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ABSTRACT

In order to determine how certain symbolic labels became attached to the city of Memphis, Tennessee, this monograph examines the events leading up to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and describes the events, personalities, and social forces that dominated the strike by garbage workers in 1968. It analyzes the strike in terms of the culture as an interpretive system and includes a textual analysis of local press coverage that assesses the use of symbols to make sense of the strike. The monograph asserts that black anarchy was the symbol for the strike, paternalism the symbol for efforts to end the strike by the city council, and the outside agitator the symbol for King. It also contends that Mayor Henry Loeb was interpreted by whites as a heroic leader, benevolently protecting the black man; that blacks saw Loeb as plantation owner-reincarnate; and that P.J. Ciampa, a national union officer, was a symbol of immense power in the culture, and seen as a latter-day carpetbagger who exploited the black garbage collectors. The monograph concludes that the newspapers, the "Commercial Appeal" and the "Press-Scimitar," defined the strike culturally using the themes and concepts that historically have ordered experience in Southern culture. (SRT)

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Richard Lentz

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A Study of Culture, Symbols, and the Press

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Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

1621 College Street University of South Carolina
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RICHARD LENTZ

Sixty-Five Days in Memphis: A Study Of Culture, Symbols, and the Press

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Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

Accepted for Publication December 1985

RICHARD LENTZ is Associate Professor of Journalism and Telecommunication at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona. He was a reporter and copy editor for the *Commercial Appeal* from 1965 to 1973, and covered some of the events of the Memphis garbage strike. He wishes to thank James W. Carey, Stanley Mallach, and John Pauly who graciously consented to read the manuscript. Each provided helpful suggestions to strengthen it.

DURING MOST OF THE SOUTHERN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, Memphis, the largest city in Tennessee, stood apart as a city that was beginning "to shine as a beacon of reason and decency" in race relations.[1] In 1968, however, that beacon flickered and went out. Memphis came to be an epithet signaling white racism. It became as well an epitaph, embedded in the catch phrase, Montgomery to Memphis, for the era of struggle against segregation by the black Southerner. A series of events caused these symbolic labels to be attached to the city. The most important was the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the black leader whose career began with the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-1956 and ended with his death in Memphis twelve years later. But King's death did not stand alone; rather it was bound inextricably to the cause that drew him to Memphis.

The cause was improbable enough — a strike by approximately thirteen hundred garbage collectors and other laborers, most of whom were black. Their major demand was that the city government recognize their union, Local 1733 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. In less than two weeks, however, a simple labor dispute was transformed into a racial issue, and about a month later, was thrust onto the national stage because of King's presence.

The strike has engaged the attention of some scholars, primarily biographers of King or those conducting specialized studies of King or the civil rights movement. Still others have been drawn to the strike as an episode in the history of Memphis or the development of organized labor in the modern South.[2] This monograph takes a different conceptual tack, approaching the strike as a study in culture as an interpretive system. More specifically, the monograph is organized as a narrative

that treats the events, personalities, and social forces that dominated the strike. Embedded in this is a textual analysis of local press coverage. In the case of the latter, however, the concern is not media effects, *per se*, but the use of symbols to make sense of the strike within a cultural framework.

Language, in the theoretical scheme of Kenneth Burke, orders experience because it creates the forms which make possible the communication of experience. More specifically, language provides "strategies for dealing with situations." Burke suggested a series of sociological categories that would consider works of art as "strategies for selecting enemies and allies, for socializing losses, for warding off evil eye, for purification, propitiation, and desanctification, consolation and vengeance, admonition and exhortation, implicit commands or instructions of one sort or another." Yet Burke can be read too narrowly, as James W. Carey suggests. Journalism itself is a form of imaginative literature which provides "audiences with models for action and feeling, with ways to size up situations."[3]

Such models may be traced to conceptions, "historically transmitted patterns of meaning embodied in symobls," to borrow a phrase from Clifford Geertz, that order experience in a given culture. These conceptions do not, however, exist merely in "some gauzy world of mental forms but" — to take the example of politics — "in the concrete immediacy of partisan struggle." Thus culture becomes the structure of meaning through which experience is shaped and politics one of the "principal arenas in which such structures publicly unfold."[4] To be sure, the act cannot be reduced to the symbolism surrounding it; having a baby and writing a poem about having a baby are not quite the same, to use the example from Hugh Duncan. But most men and women are removed from the world of politics. For them, as Murray Edelman rightly observes, politics is a passing parade of symbols arrayed, perhaps most of all, by the news media.[5]

Such was the case in Memphis in 1968 where the garbage strike, beginning as a political episode, became a crisis because of the cultural meanings attached to it. This mingling of politics and culture makes the city's two daily newspapers, the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar*, ideal sources for a study of culture and meaning. Politically powerful, the two papers were seldom ignored by Memphis politicians. The *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar*, expecially the former, had demonstrated their ability to make things happen — and not happen — on the public stage of the city. More importantly, during the garbage strike, their articles and commentary tapped the power of certain culture conceptions[6] during an ill-defined and evolving crisis.

The Making of a Crisis

A few months beforehand a suggestion that a strike by city employees would evolve into a racial issue would have seemed ill-considered. Arguing against it would have been the recent history of Memphis, the halting course of union organizing in the South, and, as well, the record of the

Commercial Appeal and *Press-Scimitar*, whose editorial voices had sought to avert rather than exacerbate racial conflicts. With isolated exceptions, Memphis had adjusted peacefully to the passing of Jim Crow. By the mid-1960s, parks and schools, as well as some restaurants and theaters, had been desegregated to a limited extent, and in contrast to many other Southern cities, black officers had served in the ranks of the Memphis police department for more than a decade.[7]

Even more unusual was the black political power responsible for much of the desegration. During most of the first half of the twentieth century, blacks held a recognized, if subservient place in the political machine of Edward Hale Crump, Boss Crump of Memphis. Their political force grew rapidly after Crump's death in 1954. By 1967, 80,033 of the city's 235,505 voters were black — approximately 34 percent of the registration list at a time when blacks comprised about 40 percent of the population. Some blacks served in appointed or elected positions in state or local government, including one lawyer elected to the Tennessee legislature in 1964, and a judge who served on the criminal court bench in Shelby County, in which Memphis was located. Black votes provided the crucial margin as well in the successful campaign in 1967 to replace the city board of commissioners with a mayor-council form of government.[8] When installed on the first day 1968, the new city government included four black men in policy-making positions — three of the thirteen members of the city council and one appointed officer in the mayor's cabinet.

The cautious style of black leaders made confrontations in the streets unlikely. The degree of black conservatism was illustrated by the sociologist C. Eric Lincoln, using the example of Jesse Turner, a black banker who was president of the NAACP chapter. Tuner was "probably the most outspoken of Memphis blacks and was considered by some of his more moderate colleagues to be a black radical. . . That's the first time I had ever heard of a banker being a radical. But this gives you some idea of the kind of conservative stance that most black Memphians adopted." There was a decided preference for NAACP tactics, which favored legal and legislative processes over demonstrations. As a result, Memphis had escaped most of the wrenching protest demonstrations that characterized the civil rights movement in the 1960s.[9]

That blacks should take up the cause of a union was itself a suspect idea. In Memphis, as in the South generally, blacks regarded organized labor with suspicion because unions often excluded them or permitted Jim Crow locals as a sop to segregation. The result, as one black clergyman explained after the strike, was that "we've got too many blacks with hangups on the evils of supporting unions."[10] The halting attempts to organize the garbage collectors demonstrated the apathy, if not outright animosity, toward organized labor in black Memphis. The membership of Local 1733 was predominantly black, but the union could have entertained few realistic hopes that blacks would support its cause. Two other national unions attempted unsuccessfully to organize and win recognition of locals before AFSCME entered the field. Its organizing effort hit a snag in 1966 when Local 1733 lost a one-day strike against

the city government. In those instances, little support came from the black community. The parent union grasped the dimensions of the problem quickly. During the early days of the strike its representatives sought to exclude race as a factor in a labor dispute that they regarded as ill-timed and ill-conceived.[11]

Nor had the two Memphis dailies raised racist banners, as was the case with some Southern newspapers. The *Commercial Appeal*, the conservative voice of the Memphis establishment, and the somewhat more moderate *Press-Scimitar* had strongly condemned white violence during racial crises in other cities, in particular the bloody rioting by a white mob when James Meredith broke the color line at the University of Mississippi in 1962. Both newspapers had endorsed black political candidates, and they were somewhat sympathetic to the demands, though not the tactic, of demonstrators who staged a series of sit-ins in Memphis in 1960 and 1961. On the whole, concluded a researcher for the bi-racial Southern Regional Council in 1964, the two Scripps-Howard newspapers had given "skillful encouragement in the campaign against prejudice and discrimination."[12]

Viewed against the turbulence and violence in other cities, Memphis presented a relatively unmarred picture of racial tranquility. Although a series of sit-ins and other protest demonstrations were staged in the early 1960s, the demonstrations in Memphis fell short of the scale of the great campaigns of Martin Luther King in Birmingham in 1963 or Selma in 1965; the city had no experience remotely comparable to the bloody rioting in Watts in 1965 in which thirty-four were killed, or Detroit and Newark two years later which together claimed sixty-nine lives. Nevertheless, there was a deceptive quality to the surface calm as Memphis approached its crisis in 1968. Despite the progress in adjusting to social change, numerous other problems, social and economic, burdened black Memphians, as indeed black Americans. Furthermore, these did not lend themselves to the easy solution of token desegregation. A white lawyer, who was the first chairman of the bi-racial Memphis Committee on Community Relations, caught the gist of the situation when he remarked: "There comes a time when . . . everything is desegregated, and yet the Negro says, 'Well, yeah, this is done. But still I am not the man I ought to be.'"[13] Black Memphians were scarcely alone in that feeling. If anything, they were catching up belatedly with a sense of relative deprivation, to use a term borrowed from social science,[14] that had long since swept out of the South and into the rest of black America.

Before 1963, the black revolt was confined essentially to the South. During King's Birmingham campaign, the situation began to change rapidly and dramatically. Hundreds of demonstrations were staged across America. Some were no more than expressions of support for King's attempt to bring down Jim Crow in the citadel of segregation. Increasingly, however, the demonstrations outside the South began to zero in on inequality and discrimination grounded not in law but in existing social and economic conditions.

The impetus for the spreading black revolt came from the South, where civil rights campaigns were winning access to public accommoda-

tions and, later, to the political process. However much black Americans applauded those victories, their own lives were touched by them scarcely at all. Outside the South, the ballot and public accommodations were generally open to blacks. Yet their other burdens, if different, were as great: their schools, in many cases, as segregated as any in the South; their housing, because of one of Jim Crow's quirks, even more segregated, and restricted all too often to teeming slums; their livelihoods derived from the industrial equivalents of hewing wood and drawing water, or worse, the lack of jobs at all because blacks suffered more from unemployment than whites. If those burdens grew out of poverty and *de facto* discrimination rather than statutes, they were no lighter and produced no less resentment.

Resentment edged over into bitterness soon enough. The black movement, especially outside the South, became increasingly more militant and increasingly bent away from the Gandhian nonviolence preached by King. New prophets were rising, preaching new doctrines, and they were being heard. Years before the Memphis garbage strike, there was ample evidence of the sense among black Americans of deprivation — of opportunity lost or denied — in the urban uprisings that scarred many of the major cities of the United States.

No better off economically than their brethren elsewhere in the country, blacks in Memphis no doubt shared that sense of deprivation, even if they had passed over street demonstrations in favor of political maneuvering in order to improve their lot. In 1967, however, there was a dramatic signal that the black man was losing ground in Memphis. A few months after black votes provided the winning edge for the mayor-council government, the officers of the new government were elected. A.W. Willis, Jr., a black state representative was among the mayoral candidates, but he did not receive enough votes to make the run-off election. In the run-off were Henry Loeb, a former mayor, and the incumbent Mayor William B. Ingram, whose popularity in the black community was demonstrated when he received more black votes in the first round of voting than Willis.

More important was the man who defeated Ingram in the run-off. Campaigning as a reformer early in his political career, Loeb enjoyed considerable black support. That ended when he embraced a segregationist image in the early 1960s. In a city in which black voters expected to be courted by white politicians, Loeb essentially wrote off the black vote in 1967, winning with solid white support in a racially polarized campaign.[15] Despite the election of three blacks to the city council, Loeb's victory demonstrated vividly that black political power could be nullified.

There were other signs that the surface tranquility might be roiled in Memphis. The *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar* provided one. Put simply, the two dailies enjoyed a progressive reputation that was as much image as substance. Their strong voices had been raised against segregationist violence and for quiet negotiations between black and white leaders to desegregate some facilities peacefully. Measured against the sputtering racism of some other newspapers in the region,

the papers indeed appeared responsible. Yet both opposed enactment of federal civil rights bills in 1964. And both had demonstrated insensitivity, sometimes descending to the point of racism. The *Commercial Appeal* was the worse offender. One of its editorial policies, the refusal to grant honorific titles to most blacks, as it routinely did for whites, led to a boycott that cut into the paper's circulation in the black community. It also published a locally produced cartoon feature offensive to blacks. "Hambone's Meditations" usually depicted a caricatured black man, idling or doing menial chores, who delivered in dialect pithy statements such as the following: "Kun'l Bob want me to swap mah ole mule for a truck . . . Shucks! Ain't no truck gwine unerstan' me!!"[16]

Such attitudes woud have been less important in a city with weaker newspaper voices. The two dailies reached most of the 180,000 households in the city. The *Commercial Appeal's* daily morning circulation in Memphis was 113,000; the evening *Press-Scimitar's* was 93,000. Newspapers were of course, far from the only media in Memphis. The city had the usual array of broadcast media. There were three commercial television stations (one operated by the Scripps-Howard chain that owned the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar*) and seventeen radio stations, and these collectively (no doubt, in some cases individually) reached as many Memphians as did the papers.[17]

A number of factors combined to amplify the editorial voices of the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar*. The first was the vacuum in political leadership produced when death broke the iron grip of Boss Crump in 1954. While Crump's passing led to a rise in black political power, it also did the same for the Memphis press. The newspapers' influence rose significantly because of the aversion to any rebirth of machine politics. Among Memphis politicians ran the belief that endorsements by the papers were important for winning elections, a notion not without foundation. The most telling evidence of the two dailies' dominance of the political culture appears in their instrumental role in bringing about the campaign for the mayor-council form of government.[18]

The immediate political situation in 1968 was another factor. The garbage strike was begun less than two months after the new government took office. Most of its key officers, holding elective office for the first time, were unsure of their responsibilities. Particularly critical was the division between executive and legislative powers — a distinction that had not existed in the old commission government. As the strike wore on, the question arose as to whether it should be left to the council or the mayor to deal with the strike. "The council wavered," recalled one white member of that body. "There were no precedents to guide it. Technically, it seemed an administrative problem."[19]

The problem was far from technical; indeed, it was one of the most critical factors in the strike because of Mayor Loeb. Loeb was no race-baiter; though owing no political debt to black Memphis, he appointed a black attorney as one of his five cabinet officers. But Loeb was doctrinaire as a politician, exquisitely sensitive to white public opinion, and ridden by the fear of losing face. Those attributes, combined with his re-

jection of black votes and his domination of the city government's negotiations with the union, would make Loeb a powerful symbol of white intransigence to blacks in Memphis. Loeb's role — as that of the Memphis press — was made more crucial because of the peculiarly public nature of some events. Loeb insisted, for example, that negotiations with union representatives be conducted with reporters present — a radical departure from the accepted practices of collective bargaining.[20] Those bargaining sessions became a forum for the communication of culturally charged symbols of deep and abiding importance in Memphis as a Southern city.

The Strike Begins

The strike was started on February 12. Among the precipitating factors was the loss of wages for garbage collectors and other laborers because of new policies adopted by the Loeb administration. Overtime pay was all but eliminated. Workers were confronted as well by the probability that they would lose part of their regular wages when inclement weather made work impossible. Another important factor, at least in the judgment of one union leader, was a tragic accident. Two members of a collection crew, taking refuge from the rain in the back of a truck, were crushed to death when the garbage-packing mechanism malfunctioned. Their families received only token payments from the city government — and these in the form of gratuities — because the workers were not covered by Tennessee's workmen's compensation law.[21] A widely publicized garbage strike in New York City in February also figured in the Memphis labor dispute, perhaps serving as an example for the thirteen hundred laborers. Whether it had that effect, the New York strike provided fuel for suspicions in the Memphis city government and Memphis press that outside influence — not legitimate grievances — caused the city's garbage collectors to walk off their jobs.

In sixty-five days, the strike went through three phases. At first, it was a minor dispute with relatively simple items to be resolved. Although the eventual settlement included a small pay increase, the principal issue was not money but the refusal of the city government to sign a contract with the union and to arrange for the automatic deduction of dues from the paychecks of union members. On the surface no more than a simple technical matter, a mechanism for deducting dues was vital to the survival of Local 1733, which had been unable to collect the money directly.[22] Within two weeks, the strike became a racial issue, a transformation in which the Memphis papers played a role. Finally, when Martin Luther King became involved in the strike by happenstance in late March, the once-obscure labor dispute rose to the national stage.

During each of the three phases, the articles and editorials published by the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar* were woven into three general themes. The political power of the newspapers ensured their voices would be heard when it came to a strike by employees of the city government. But the power of the three themes was generated by concepts that grew out of the centrality of race in the culture of the South.[23]

The most striking – and probably the most powerful – was the theme of the outsider. While peculiar neither to Memphis nor to the South, a siege mentality has shaped much of Southern history; it appeared, for example, in the Southern response to abolitionism before the Civil War, and arose most recently during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Stated simply, the theme invoked the belief that outsiders were agitating blacks who otherwise would be content with their lot.[24]

A second theme was grounded in the concept that during a period of social unrest public order had to be maintained at any cost. It, too, was not unique to the South. Any number of statements along the same lines were voiced throughout the country in response to demonstrations or civil disorders in the 1960s. The Memphis papers gave the theme a particular twist, one as deeply rooted in the culture of the region as the theme of the outsider. Implicitly, the newspaper accounts resurrected in modern dress the fear of servile insurrection that haunted the antebellum South.

The third theme was an amalgam of paternalism and another racial stereotype. Blacks were stereotyped as child-like creatures incapable of conducting their own affairs. Paternalism completed the circle of meaning, masking the immorality of segregation as a social system by putting in place the notion that whites protected and cared for "their" blacks, usually by providing some form of largess at the back door. Thus it was that the demands for equality raised by the strikers produced a mixture of puzzlement and shock that blacks would challenge the authority of those who had taken care of them.

• • •

While the accidental deaths of the two garbage collectors were reported, only the strike in New York City was covered at length. The *Commercial Appeal* or *Press-Scimitar* offered a variation on the theme of the outsider; that distant work stoppage caused the walkout in Memphis.[25] So far as the two newspapers were concerned, however, the first phalanx of invaders arrived on the second day of the strike. The parent union, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, sent troubleshooters to Memphis to run the strike and to bargain for a contract. They were there because of what happened two years earlier.

Acting on the basis of some bad advice from AFSCME field representatives, Local 1733 struck in 1966. Few preparations were made for a strike. To make it worse, from AFSCME's perspective, the organizers meekly folded the strike after one day because the city government won a court injunction against it. Determined to avoid a repetition of that disastrous affair, the national union dispatched P.J. Ciampa, director of field operations, to deal with an already unpromising situation in 1968. (Another measure of how seriously the national union took the strike came later when its president Jerry Wurf flew to Memphis, not only to show the union's suport but to conduct negotiations himself.) In fact, AFSCME had no good choice other than to take control of the strike in

Memphis. Local 1733 possessed few resources beyond its members' desire to have a union in fact as well as in name.[26]

The theme of the outsider was developed most intensively when the two newspapers reported an overnight bargaining session which began on the second day of the strike and extended into the early hours of the third. The negotiators were Loeb and Ciampa. Not surprisingly, little progress was made toward a settlement; indeed neither side could have expected much to be produced from an initial meeting. But the bargaining session produced powerful symbolism because of some verbal sparring between Loeb and Ciampa. In the *Press-Scimitar's* account, Ciampa started the exchange:

> "You have not behaved like a public servant but like a public dictator through the whole damn thing, and that's tragic."
>
> "I'm sorry you feel that way [Loeb replied]. The record doesn't bear that out." When Loeb made the statement that the law was being broken by Ciampa, the union official retorted:
>
> "You're a liar when you say that. If I'm breaking the law, then take me into court. If I'm not breaking the law, then shut your big, fat mouth."[27]

Far bitterer words have been exchanged in the heat of collective bargaining. These, however, touched nerves in Memphis, as one union representative recalled, in ways "that were really incredible." The general response among most whites was described by the chairman of the city council, who was regarded as a moderate on most matters, including race: "Ciampa acted like a Sicilian anarchist or a hood . . . Ciampa gave the union a tough image among Memphians. Everyone was indignant because Loeb was popular, brand-new, and our mayor was talked to this way."[28] Ciampa himself was struck by the spreading rancor. He recalled later that "'Ciampa Go Home' bumper stickers sprouted all across the city." Still, he believed the verbal confrontation with Loeb won him the trust of the union members, and he was probably correct. Loeb had already made a speech to a large number of strikers who assembled in a hall after marching to city hall. Apparently regarding his promises as paternalistic, they jeered him, and he stalked out.[29]

After the bargaining session, the newspapers continued to develop the theme with stories and editorials that amplified the fears of the outsider. From the evidence of an unscientific television poll, these were emerging with startling intensity.[30] The *Commercial Appeal* published a vitriolic editorial which used quotation marks to dismiss the union's leadership motives as spurious.[31] Even more pointed was its characterization of the union leadership as the enemy:

> The bluster, swagger, and insolence of the men purporting to represent city garbage workers cannot be construed as "bargaining." They "negotiate" with Mayor Henry Loeb and the city of Memphis somewhat like the Viet Cong and Hanoi do with the South Vietnamese and the United States.[32]

Those words appeared during the bloody Tet offensive in Vietnam which had a "powerful impact on the emotions, opinions, and convictions of millions of Americans and the futures of their political leaders." More

than 60,000 Communist-directed troops launched coordinated attacks on January 30 and 31 against major cities and towns in South Vietnam, including one target fraught with symbolic importance, the American embassy in Saigon. For more than two weeks, Tet had dominated the news, and neither the ferocity of the fighting nor the intense news coverage of it would abate significantly for weeks.[33] Now the *Commercial Appeal* offered its readers, members of perhaps the most hawkish culture in America, a lesson drawn from that war: don't trust the enemy, whether Viet Cong or meddling union men.

And if that editorial did not draw the battle lines clearly enough, a reiteration of the warning about outsiders did the trick when it was published two days later:

> . . . As Memphis enters the second week of this determined effort by a national group to crack the resistance of city government to unionization of city employees, the situation will be more tense, and the garbage cans will be heaped higher. Meanwhile, more union brass is due on the scene.[34]

The *Press-Scimitar* demonstrated much the same attitude toward union brass. Certainly it complained of Ciampa's lack of Southern gentility. But the *Press-Scimitar* preferred to make a larger point, this being that Ciampa exemplified the union, and it did this by juxtaposing Ciampa's remarks with what appeared to be an endorsement of his conduct by his union's president:

> It was exemplified yesterday by its spokesman's telling Mayor Loeb to "shut your big, fat mouth" and calling Loeb a "liar" to his face . . . The AFSCME's president, Jerry W. Wurf, spoke highly of Ciampa from Washington today. "I'm very pleased," were Wurf's words.[35]

Wurf may have felt bound to publicly support his man on the scene, but it was unlikely that he was pleased. Years later, in fact, he conceded that the union erred when it sent Ciampa to Memphis rather than a negotiator of more diplomatic mien.[36] A first-class disaster was in the making, created by Ciampa's intemperate rhetoric, by Loeb's maneuvering, by the reports published about their meeting, and the response in the culture to all of these. While Ciampa's heated words created the union's immediate problem, too much significance can be attached to them. What was more important was that Loeb had set the stage for a confrontation — and that it took a particular symbolic form in the pages of the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar*, whose powerful editorial voices were unlikely to be ignored.

From the beginning of the strike, the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar* had hammered away at the theme of the outsider. Their warnings lacked force because they were about a distant event, the New York City garbage strike, and lacked a symbolic figure to make the message direct and urgent. In Ciampa, the two papers found and projected the personification of that which they had warned about. Ciampa was impatient, rude, and profane; Loeb the opposite — polite, mannered, the ever-courteous host even when he seemingly had cause to be provoked to anger. Above all, Ciampa was the intruder, the modern-day equivalent

of the carpetbagger of Reconstruction, a symbol of deep and enduring significance in the culture, even though one almost certainly read in different ways by blacks and whites.

The antipathy to Ciampa could scarcely be due to uncollected garbage. Memphis had a fetish for public tidiness, but the garbage cans could not have been heaped high enough by the third day of the strike to cause the sort of intense reaction that Wurf's worried men would soon report to him. It was this: "the mere sound of Ciampa's name sends tremors through the white community and" — a significant point, this — "even responsible elements of the black community."[37]

The tremors testified eloquently to the power generated by the culture concept of the intruder. This is not to say, of course, that the fear of the outsider gripped black and white in the same way or necessarily with equal strength. What it signified was that the monoculture of the South was a web spun by both races, even if its filaments were distinctively colored black or white. Let one fiber be jarred, and the vibrations would register elsewhere in the culture. That happened when whites in the ante-bellum South tossed in their beds, haunted by nightmares of bloody slave rebellions. And it was not surprising that some black leaders in Memphis got the notion that trouble was drawing near in 1968 when whites were closing ranks because of the siege mentality of the South.

Nor was that the only concept whose power was tapped. In terms of racial stereotyping, for example, the *Commercial Appeal* went out of its way to depict T.O. Jones, the black president of Local 1733, as a shiftless worker who was dismissed because of insubordination and who could not get along with others. To complete the picture, the paper dredged up a legal problem with a bad check that Jones had had in 1966, although its story grudgingly conceded that another union member, not Jones, was at fault.[38]

Thematic elements were also merged by the *Commercial Appeal* in order to demonstrate that the city government was benevolent and the union manipulative. An editorial asserted on February 15 that "Memphis is caught in this bind because it has tried to provide employment to unskilled workers on a large scale"[39] — as if the city fathers were acting out of good will rather than patent necessity when they hired men to do the dirty job of collecting garbage. In later editorials, the *Commercial Appeal* urged the strikers to return to their senses and to recognize the true motives of the outsiders. One editorial argued this:

> . . . It should be clear to the absent workers that their purported "leaders" are doing them little service.
>
> At first it became evident that the union chiefs were intent on getting a dues checkoff which would enable them to collect the money they had been unable to collect in the past.[40]

Implicit in the editorial was the paternalistic notion that the striking city employees needed to be protected from the union; that is, from themselves. The argument was passing strange. School teachers and bus drivers, who worked for other branches of city government not controlled by the mayor or city council, had had their union or professional dues routinely deducted from their wages for years. If this was a glaring in-

consistency, it was not one that the two newspapers wanted to examine until the second month of the strike, and after the strike had been transformed into a racial issue.[41]

The *Press-Scimitar* also attempted to demonstrate the benevolence of the city government by using Mayor Loeb symbolically. Loeb was depicted as a leader who had identified with his men from the time he served as public works commissioner, the officer responsible for garbage collections in the old form of government. Loeb, according to the *Press-Scimitar*, "has referred to himself as a 'former garbage man.' Now hundreds of men who wear that title. . . refuse to work for Loeb until he agrees to meet the demands of their union."[42] Its point was that the strikers had deserted one of their own — but that Loeb had not deserted them. Much was made of the fact that Loeb took steps to ensure that the families of the strikers did not suffer unduly:

> One [step] was an order not to shut off utilities in their home for nonpayment of bills, which would have resulted in no heat, and the wives and the children of strikers would have suffered.
>
> The second was an order to authorize $10,000 in food stamps so the families wouldn't go hungry.[43]

Loeb had indeed authorized those measures, but the actions themselves were important only because of their meaning in the culture. To whites, Loeb might (and very likely did) appear to be conducting himself according to the dictates of the culture by almsgiving. To blacks, Loeb was available as another cultural symbol. The occupant of the most visible office in the city government was paternalistic: Loeb would grant charity but not recognition of the union; food but not the equality that is a necessary element of collective bargaining.

The public order theme took two forms during the first phase of the strike. One invoked the fear that blacks would embark on a rampage in the absence of strict police controls. For most of the first phase, however, that element was overshadowed by the attempts of the two newspapers to limit the debate about the strike to its illegality.

As the papers repeatedly stated, the strike was illegal under Tennessee law.[44] That did not dispose of the issue. Whether by design or journalistic failure, the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar* did not explore an equally salient point. Their stories and editorials implied that bargaining with and recognition of public employee unions would be illegal because Tennessee law did not expressly authorize this. Putting the case even more strongly, the *Commercial Appeal* delivered this warning: "Mayor Loeb could be accused of ignoring legalities if he [bargains] with union leaders who actually have no legal standing as representatives of the garbage crews." Lest others in city government step in, the paper quickly added: "The same goes for the city council."[45]

Not until after the assassination of King did either newspaper provide clear guidance about the actual legal situation. By then it was imperative that the strike be settled, and the *Press-Scimitar* duly reported that the Tennessee cities of Nashville and Chattanooga had signed contracts with unions representing some of their employees.[46] Furthermore, the two papers' concern for the rule of law was limited. They did not object to the

city government's use of police officers as labor spies. The *Commercial Appeal* made passing reference to that practice, but neither it nor the *Press-Scimitar* chose to investigate further. Their editorial silence, which amounted to a tacit endorsement of having policemen spy on the union, probably was due to a growing obsession with maintaining public order.[47]

As the strike neared the close of the first phase, the two dailies overemphasized minor incidents or threats of violence. In roughly the same period, as one researcher found, "there were only six instances of actual violence reported [to the authorities] and only one of these was linked to the union." The *Commercial Appeal* took extra steps to reassure would-be strikebreakers. One of its reporters, assigned to work for a day on a garbage-collection crew, passed along a recruiting pitch from a representative of the city government: "If you want to work, I can have you on a truck in thirty minutes. It's hard work, but not as hard as it used to be, and you will have police protection."[48]

By the time of that report, the city administration had begun to hire workers to replace the strikers. As the potential for racial problems grew, there were some tentative steps toward a settlement. Loeb and the union, now represented by AFSCME President Wurf, negotiated on February 18. They could not reach an agreement on either a contract or deducting union dues from the paychecks of its members. That evening, the city council met secretly. Its members voted eleven to one to authorize a pay increase of fifteen cents per hour, if Loeb concurred. Uncertain of their authority or too timid to engage in a confrontation with the mayor or both, the council members would not go beyond that conditional offer of an increase in wages.[49]

Thereafter, despite several additional bargaining sessions, the strike settled into a stalemate. No sense of urgency pressed the Loeb administration. Memphians were adjusting to an annoying but scarcely critical disruption of the previously efficient garbage collection service, and cool weather and garbage collection by strikebreakers prevented any immediate public health problems.

Turning Point

A chain of events on February 22 and 23 shattered the stalemate, drawing a demarcation line between labor strike and racial issue. The first, a sit-in that developed during a hearing conducted by the public works committee of the city council, signaled that a change in the strike was coming. As early as February 15, the NAACP chapter in Memphis threatened to stage protests in support of the strike. Almost certainly, however, the NAACP lacked the power to mobilize black Memphis. That was demonstrated several months earlier when the chapter failed to persuade blacks to unite behind the candidacy of a black mayoral candidate — a failure described by David M. Tucker as "a disaster for the NAACP leadership." If anyone moved black Memphis, it would have to be the black clergy. Black ministers hitherto had been absent or well in the background; some had offered assistance to the strikers February 16,

but this apparently amounted to little more than meeting their pastoral obligation to feed the hungry.[50] The hearing before the council committee attracted a number of black ministers, including several who would become prominent figures in the strike.

Heated accusations were hurled at council members conducting the hearing. Despite the disputatious tone, the hearing and sit-in were entirely peaceful. Nevertheless, the sit-in, in combination with events of the following day produced a marked shift in the editorial voices of the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar*. Previously, the papers had exaggerated the potential for violence. As the strike neared its turning point, tones of near hysteria began to appear. The news columns of the *Commercial Appeal* offered a picture of near anarchy — and of blacks forgetting their place. One story reported that "the plush, red carpeted council chamber was jammed with strikers who vaulted across the railing onto the dais reserved for city officials."[51] An editorial amplified the frightening prospect of shaking off the restraints of public order:

> Memphis garbage workers have turned an illegal walkout into anarchy, and Mayor Henry Loeb is exactly right when he says, "We can't submit to this sort of thing."
>
> . . . Threats were made, and there was a clear attempt to create fear in the public mind that violence might occur unless the administrative branch surrenders to union demands.[52]

Accompanying the editorial was a cartoon that raised the specter of an uprising by blacks. The panel, titled "Beyond the Bounds of Tolerance," depicted a rotund black man, with an uncanny resemblance to T.O. Jones, the president of Local 1733. The figure crouched ape-like atop a garbage can surrounded by trash. Wavy lines, representations of stenches, arose from the refuse and the silhouetted figure. Above the figure's head was the legend, "Threat of Anarchy."[53]

Blatantly racist in tone, the cartoon indicated that a shift in the editorial line of the *Commercial Appeal* was underway. Previously, the paper had reserved its most stinging rebukes for union men meddling in the affairs of Memphis. Now the target was Jones, who could not be considered an outsider; he had worked for years as a garbage collector, and had organized the union local. Moreover, as the *Commercial Appeal* had asserted at some length, and accurately, Jones had little power. Wurf and his men were running the strike. Thus, the anarchy that Jones intended to symbolize could only be that arising from racial conflict, not a labor dispute.

The *Press-Scimitar* was less strident. Its lead article pointed out that the sit-in occured only after the chairman of the public works committee, a black politician, asked that the workers, rather than their leaders, come forward to state their case. A justification of sorts was thus provided for the sit-in; it started after there was an attempt to drive a wedge between leaders and followers. Still, the *Press-Scimitar* was haunted by its own fears. An editorial asserted that "intimidation such as was brought to bear yesterday cannot be tolerated."[54]

The sit-in ended with what appeared to be a victory for the union. A resolution was drafted that recommended the full city council adopt a

plan for dues deduction and authorize a contract with the union. Two black members of the public works committee voted for the resolution. The third member, a white politician, abstained by prearrangement. What appeared to be a victory turned out to be little more than a gesture made in order to end the sit-in. The councilman who abstained recalled that he told Jerry Wurf that the resolution would be repudiated by the other ten members of the city council.[55] While the resolution persuaded the strikers to call off their sit-in, it also prodded the *Commercial Appeal* to define the situation in a lead article and an editorial. The latter maintained that "it must be remembered that the city council is the legislative branch of our government, and the mayor is the administrative head, the man who must ultimately make the decisions in this strike."[56]

For a number of reasons, the situation was not so clear. The city charter granted the mayor the power to execute all contracts except those involving franchises, and restrained the council from interfering with administrative or executive functions. At the same time, the council, certainly in theory, was the principal policy-making body of city government. It could — as indeed it did a year later — authorize unions for city workers and the deduction of union dues. More to the point, the council faced a situation in 1968 that required more in the way of will power than legal power. Throughout the strike, a white member of that body recalled, "always we had this problem: if there were no mayor. . . . we would have settled it a number of times . . . But we never coud get a majority of the council . . . willing to defy the mayor.[57] On February 23, the day after the sit-in, the council was unwilling to defy Henry Loeb, perhaps as well, the *Commercial Appeal.* Loeb had the sole authority to deal with Local 1733, the council decided. There were four dissenting votes — three blacks, joined by a white colleague who believed the resolution did not adequately support Loeb.[58]

Those white politicians were new to their responsibilities; less than six weeks had lapsed since they took their oaths of office. The mayor-council form of government was just as new. Lines between legislative and executive powers were just beginning to be sorted out, and that process would go on for more than a year. As politicians, the council members could hardly have escaped the belief that the Memphis papers exercised considerable political power. The government in which they served was the end product of a campaign that the *Commercial Appeal* set in motion and which the *Press-Scimitar* supported effectively as well. Now, a newspaper that they believed to be powerful was saying in so many words that members of the city council could hand over the responsiblity for an escalating crisis to the mayor with an easy conscience.

More importantly, what the white members of the city council did made sense within the culture — or, more properly, within the symbolic structure assembled out of culture concepts and unfolded on the public stage of Memphis by the newspapers. Loeb was a reassuring symbol to the council members, actors in a culture as well as politicians. As Murray Edelman observes, "what symbol can be more reassuring than the incumbent of a high position who knows what to do and is willing to act,

especially when others are bewildered and alone?"[59] It would be one thing to gravely debate the merits of following the example of other cities in Tennessee and signing a contract with a union representing thirteen hundred laborers, and quite another to deal with a crisis whose dimensions were culturally defined. If there was an invasion by outsiders bent on stirring up blacks, if servile insurrection was looming, firm and decisive action was required. These threats could only be met by the Horatio-like Henry Loeb. And that notion was as difficult to escape as the commonplace in Memphis politics that elections could turn on words published by the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar*.

The words of the newspapers and the decision of the city council were interpreted in a different light by other members of that culture. Approximately nine hundred union members and some supporters from the black community assembled to hear the decision of the city council. They came with a taste of victory from the sit-in of the day before. The audience was jolted by the announcement that the strikers would have to deal with Loeb or no one at all. The decision was bad enough, but the situation was made worse by the tone of the session. There was a quick announcement, the meeting was adjourned, and most members of the council scurried out a rear door. The public address system in the hall was switched off to prevent the union from staging a rally. The effect, as a white politician recalled with intended irony, was that the legislative leaders of the city government handed down their predetermined decision to the strikers "from Mount Olympus, so they could do what they had to do to oblige."[60]

The strikers and their sympathizers were in no mood to oblige. In order to dissipate some of their anger, union leaders decided to conduct a march from the hall to the union headquarters. Permission was secured after some hasty and confused discussions with police supervisors and the Loeb administration, and the march got underway. The anger among the demonstrators and the police department's tight restrictions — the march coincided with the downtown rush-hour — made trouble almost inevitable. Trouble came after the marchers had gone a few blocks. A police patrol car was shoved and rocked on its wheels by marchers. (Union members later claimed, with little supporting evidence, that the car had run over the foot of a marcher.) While dispersing the crowd, policemen discriminately sprayed the demonstrators with Mace, a chemical that temporarily blinds and incapacitates. Subsequently, several persons were injured and seven others were arrested.[61]

The clash on Main Street persuaded a number of black clergymen to lend their support to Local 1733. One of their number, who was sprayed with Mace recalled:

> For thirty years I have been training to hold myself in check. I couldn't understand what made some people lose control of themselves and fly off the handle. I never thought it would happen to me. But I lost thirty years of training in just five minutes last Friday.[62]

That impassioned statement at once locates the turning point, and

fails to explain why the strike became what it did. Being cuffed around and sprayed with Mace undoubtedly pushed some clergymen over the edge, but it does not explain why that minister and a number of his colleagues, many of them conservative and deeply suspicious of unions, were marching to support one. The brief skirmish on Main Street was thus the culminating event in a chain stretching back to the earliest days of the strike; and not events alone but the meanings attached to them.

The two newspapers attached meanings to the events of February 23 by distorting them. The high-handedness of the members of the city council, for example, was shown in the most favorable light possible by the *Commercial Appeal*:

> After the city council, a representative body, had followed the democratic process to the letter and voted nine to four to reject a committee report urging Mayor Henry Loeb to seal a contract between the city and the garbage union, disgruntled workers and their fiery leaders were granted the use of the auditorium for a follow-up meeting. There the incitement began.[63]

However its actions squared with the letter of the democratic process, the council clearly violated the spirit by refusing to permit its decision to be debated. In fact, the *Commercial Appeal*'s news story conceded as much. It reported that policemen had refused to allow T.O. Jones, the president of the striking local, to use the public address system in the auditorium.[64] For its part, the *Press-Scimitar* somehow managed to find a "Basis for a Settlement" in what the city council did. As had its sister publication, the *Press-Scimitar* also criticized officers of the union and black leaders "who have contributed to the inflammatory dealing with the men and city government."[65]

Both papers also published markedly uncritical accounts of the conduct of Memphis policemen when they broke up the demonstration on Main Street. "How much better," intoned the *Press-Scimitar*, "to do it this way than to be late and soft as were police in Detroit and other places, . . . letting disturbances grow into full-scale rioting." In effect, it said, police were following the right course by cracking down on blacks before they got out of control. Almost gleefully, the *Commercial Appeal* recounted the street-level justice meted out to one union man. "P.J. Ciampa, . . . whose fiery arguments with Mayor Loeb were a feature of the first days of the strike, received a sample of Mace from officers who saw him running south from the fracas."[66] The remark about a "sample of Mace" was akin in spirit to the "whiff of grapeshot" used to clear the streets of Paris of rabble. If satisfaction was to be had from settling an old score with an outsider, the *Commercial Appeal* clearly was getting its share.

Missing from that account was other evidence that would not have so readily fitted the paper's tale of swift and deserved retribution. A black newspaper published a photograph that showed Ciampa being sprayed with Mace; he was not resisting arrest, and was, in fact, helpless. Nor was there any investigation of the union's allegations that police officers used excessive force — although some complaints were listed by the *Press-Scimitar*.[67]

In the aftermath of these events, the newspapers again attempted overtly to limit the public debate to technical issues, in particular the illegality of a strike by public employees. They renewed their pressure on Loeb to take the union to court. Fearing the creation of martyrs, Loeb had resisted this course of action earlier, and his principal legal adviser doubted that an injunction would be effective. After the skirmish on Main Street, public sentiment and editorial pressure became too great; Loeb was forced to sue lest he appear derelict in his duty.[68] Attorneys for the city government won an injunction against the union. Successful as a tactic, it failed as strategy. The court order worked well enough against the officers of Local 1733 and AFSCME, but its major effect was to quicken the change in the leadership of the strike that was already underway.

Stepping to the forefront were the black clergymen who, as the *Press-Scimitar* put it, "have been stirring up the strikers." The ministers put together an organization, naming it the Community on the Move to Equality, but it was less important than what the ministers represented. Collectively, they were the most influential segment of black Memphis. Moreover, the black clergy could make their presence felt independent of the media of mass communication. In Memphis, COME commanded more than one hundred pulpits. Following the common practice in the South, the congregations of those black churches looked to their pastors for leadership. Again and again black ministers had organized and led the campaigns of the Southern civil rights movement, and they were about to do the same in Memphis. COME signaled that a labor dispute had become an issue of race. Henceforth, as a union officer recalled, the terms of any settlement had to be acceptable "to the black community, not just the union or the strikers."[69]

A number of factors brought a simple labor problem to this point. The most obvious was the city government's failure to contain a crisis deepening almost daily. Loeb lacked the flexibility to do this, and the city council could not bring itself to face down Loeb, although it came agonizingly close on occasion.[70] As a consequence, the stage was set for confrontation. Behind-the-scenes negotiations, backed by the political force of eighty thousand voters, had served the conservative black leaders of Memphis reasonably well in the past. The strategy was bankrupt so long as Loeb refused to compromise and the city council would not intervene. Those who supported the strikers were all but forced into the streets to pressure the city government to bargain with the union.

Quite as important was the symbolism associated with the strike. By vesting Loeb with the sole authority to deal with the union, the council also ensured that he would loom over the strike as its dominant symbol. The black strikers were told that they must go to Loeb; in effect, that they must go hat in hand. And so long as Loeb held that commanding position, as he did for almost all of the sixty-five days, anger in black Memphis would remain focused on him rather than diffused among the members of the city council.

Loeb did not stand alone. To a considerable degree, his power as a symbol was strengthened by other contraposed symbols. Ciampa was

one. He made it possible for Loeb to be read by some in Memphis as a modern Horatio standing at the gate to repulse the intruders. It was to be expected that Loeb was interpreted differently by blacks; they had supported him early in his political career and turned against him when he espoused segregationist views. But another collective symbol stood beside Loeb — a black Everyman that was becoming important to blacks who comprised forty percent of the population. "Everyone could identify with the garbage man," explained one of COME's ministers. "He's got the job nobody wants; he's low on the ladder, and he's so terribly underpaid and abused; . . . it just makes everything so clear cut."[71]

Symbolism aside, everything was not quite so clearly cut. The garbage collectors of Memphis had some pressing grievances, but their strike illustrated the truism that a taste of hope is a far more powerful generator of rebellion than is despair. The garbagemen were neither cowed nor totally powerless. They were at least as politically active as other blacks in Memphis, and probably more so than most. T.O. Jones tried, for example, to strike a bargain with Loeb in 1967, offering to swing the union behind his mayoral campaign in exchange for recognition of the union. Jones was unsuccessful, but no one knowledgeable of Memphis politics would have been surprised to hear that he attempted to cut a political deal. Politics probably also accounts for the fact that garbage collectors were better off than some other workmen employed by the city government; their pay was better than some others who held dirty jobs, and at least some of their supervisors were black. And, of course, they had doggedly kept their union alive for years in the expectation that it would bring about improvements in their jobs.[72]

The union itself complicated matters. Bitter experience had predisposed blacks to distrust organized labor. In order to win broad support in black Memphis, the members of Local 1733 had to be seen as more than union men and their cause as more than a simple matter of securing a contract with their employer. Only by embodying black grievances generally and only when juxtaposed against the symbolic figure of Henry Loeb could the strikers move their brethren to identify so intensely with their plight.

The two daily newspapers played their part in the transformation of the strike. It was not the case that the newspapers, like the Roman centurion, could say to this man, go, and he would obey. Rather, they drew upon concepts deeply rooted in Southern culture to make sense of the situation; political definitions and cultural definitions coincided. During the confused and uncertain first days of the strike, the newspapers provided some critical definitions. Time and again, the papers hammered away at the theme that the strike was brought about by forces from outside Memphis. The walkout in New York City served initially to make that point. It was reiterated far more dramatically when the newspapers portrayed P.J. Ciampa, he of the rude manners and intemperate tongue, as a latter-day carpetbagger. Joined to this was the theme of white benevolence to black men. The strikers were advised to come to their senses, to repudiate their exploiters, and thereafter enjoy the beneficience of the leaders of the city government, Loeb being most prominent

among them. The third theme was of equal import in the culture. As the strike progressed, the newspapers began providing increasingly intense images of anarchy drawing nigh, of black men slipping the restraining leash of public order. The *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar* maintained, to be sure, that the strike should not be considered an issue of race. But the three themes culturally defined the strike as that which they said it was not.

The themes tapped the immense power of culture concepts. The energy thus liberated surged in opposite directions, much as the strains of "Dixie" might arouse white and black Southerners equally but with different results. Similarly, there were radically different readings of the symbols provided by the two newspapers: Ciampa as intruder or ally; Loeb as benevolent or paternalistic; demonstrations as modern equivalents of slave revolts or as black political power pushing into a new channel when an old one was closed off; the strikers as black men struggling for equality or as ciphers who required protection from exploiters. Each interpretation was, of course, antithetical; in addition, they interlocked in a closed system of meaning that precluded other explanations that would have been as logical outside the culture.[73]

Somewhat later, one of the union's leaders would grope for an explanation of how the papers had affected the course of the strike. What he came up with was the murky analysis that the newspapers "set the tone that started the mood to crystallize the community."[74] They did that, and perhaps quite a bit more. Certainly, the papers explained the unexplained in terms that made sense to white Southerners. As the symbolic structure of the strike unfolded, little was demanded of white members of the culture. His white followers need only give allegiance to Loeb, who, so far as most whites were concerned, was following the dictates of the culture by symbolically repelling the invaders and keeping the blacks under control. But the critical turning point came in black Memphis. Blacks had to read something larger into a strike by thirteen hundred city workmen, and then act upon it.

If the newspapers made sense of the strike in white Memphis, the same held true for black Memphis, though for different reasons. To be sure, the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar* were far from the only media of mass communication in Memphis. Television cameras, to cite one example, were grinding away during the meeting of Loeb and Ciampa. But blacks read not only newspapers but cultural meanings, and they responded to what they read. Certainly blacks did not ignore the papers. The boycott of the *Commercial Appeal* before the strike amply demonstrated that. There would shortly be another. During the second stage of the strike, a boycott would be launched against both newspapers. Before it was ended, it cost each paper several thousand subscribers.[75] Significantly, the boycott was continued against the papers even after the strike was settled and blacks resumed their patronage of downtown stores, the other major target. Black men and women thus were moved by what the newspapers said — but, most critically, they moved in a direction opposite that intended by the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar*.

After the events of February 22 and 23, the strike became a matter of human dignity for the black community which, as that union leader acknowledged, would have the final word when it came to any settlement. The phrase, union recognition, was coming to signify far more than the negotiation and implementation of a collective bargaining agreement. Black Memphis was reading into those words another, more fundamental meaning. It could be seen on the placards hoisted aloft and born by demonstrators — not union men only but ministers and activists and ordinary citizens — marching through downtown Memphis almost daily on their way to city hall. The signs stated, simply: "I AM A MAN."

The Strike as Racial Cause

The strike's second phase, which lasted from February 23 to March 28, resembled nothing so much as one of Martin Luther King's civil rights campaigns in the South. And with good reason: the driving force behind Community on the Move to Equality was an old associate of King's. He was James Lawson, a black Methodist minister whose church was in Memphis, who had won a reputation as a leading theoretician of Gandhian nonviolence.

Under Lawson's leadership, COME dominated the garbage strike, and the black clergy dominated COME, much as other black ministers organized and led the bus boycott in Montgomery that started the Southern movement and King's career. In Memphis, once objections to supporting a union had been pushed into the background, the fervor mustered for the garbage collectors was no less intense than in Selma in 1965 when the cause was the right to vote. Likewise, the tactics were similar: demonstration marches, sit-ins, boycotts — all seemingly lifted from the scripts of King's old campaigns.

. . . Except this was 1968, not the Montgomery of 1956, the Birmingham of 1963, or the Selma of 1965. The focus of the black revolt had shifted from the South to the nation, its edge had become harder, its demands more insistent and more difficult to meet than providing the right to vote or a seat at a lunch counter. The confrontations had grown violent, Watts exploding in 1965 and Detroit and Newark two years later, and those were but the bloodiest of the urban conflagrations that marked the middle and later years of the decade. Perhaps only in Memphis — which had little experience to match Birmingham's, much less Watts — would COME's tactics and strategy not have seemed hopelessly anachronistic. Now, with the normal avenues of political give-and-take all but shut down, Memphis was about to start catching up. So, for that matter, were the city's daily newspapers which had found anarchy in a minor and peaceful sit-in and insurrection in a brief skirmish between police officers and demonstrators.

During the second phase, the chief problem of the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar* was to separate the black community from the strike as they once sought to separate the strikers from the union. The papers sought almost desperately to exclude race as a factor in the crisis. While doing this, however, they continued to develop the same themes that

defined it in terms of race. With the black clergy leading the strike, however, the theme of the outsider all but vanished.

The *Commercial Appeal*, for example, reduced the support for the strikers in black Memphis to this question: "When does a labor problem become the politics of race?" That was the question raised by the political editor of the *Commercial Appeal* on February 28. His answer was this: when "there are sagging reputations to be bolstered [and] . . . depleted financial reserves to be shored up by donations from groups and individuals across the land." The black groups supporting the strike, he went on, "are in a competition which means they must outpromise, out-shout, and out-condemn each other" in order to burnish their images.[76] On some narrow points the writer was undoubtedly correct. Black politicians had taken up the strike, very likely out of motives as mixed as their white counterparts. Given the lively, factional black politics of Memphis, it would have been remarkable had it been otherwise. Still, the explanation excluded the possiblity that black Memphis — not just its politicians — was lining up behind the strikers.

That point could be seen in what the two papers were not reporting at this time about the economic boycott directed against them and downtown stores that depended to a considerable extent on black shoppers. The papers generally ignored the effects of the boycott. Part of their motivation no doubt was that they did not wish to publicize a boycott that threatened to cut into their profits, whether by canceled subscriptions or lost advertising revenues. But reports about effects of the boycott also would have shown, at least indirectly, that black Memphis was supporting the garbage strike. In fact, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, the editor of the *Commercial Appeal* said his newspaper ignored the boycott because it did not wish to aid the union and its supporters. Not until March 31 did the *Commercial Appeal* report, as had the *Wall Street Journal* more than two weeks earlier, that the boycott was cutting significantly into retail sales of shops in downtown Memphis.[77]

On March 5, the first major incident of the second phase occurred. It was another sit-in at a city council meeting. The stories published by both papers were more balanced than had been the case for the first sit-in. Police officers and demonstrators arranged arrest procedures in advance, and their cooperation was reported approvingly. The *Commercial Appeal* even had credit to spare for demonstrators "who followed the advice of the ministers present and practiced nonviolence." But it still put its trust in stringent police controls, not black clergy, however nonviolent. That was manifested in the editorial criticism of the manner in which the courts handled the arrests made during the demonstrations. "We wonder," the *Commercial Appeal* grumbled, "how the judges would react if they were on the demonstration front and found tormentors only just taken into custody back confronting them again with renewed vigor [secure] in the comfort of 'getting away with it.'"[78]

On the demonstration front another segment of the black population was beginning to put a fright in the newspapers. Where once the strikers had caused shivers of apprehension, the threat was now perceived as

coming from black students whose numbers were swelling the ranks of demonstrators. At least on one occasion, the *Press-Scimitar* gave way to a case of nerves. It included in a round-up story an item on a brief scuffle during which young black students showered rocks and bottles on a police car. The incident, according to the article, started at a talent show at a school, and had nothing to do with the strike. For its part, the *Commercial Appeal* greeted with evident relief an extraordinary order entered on March 15 by a judge of the juvenile court. The judge empowered policemen to arrest anyone under the age of sixteen who was on the streets during school hours. Both papers conceded that the order was directed against youngsters who were joining demonstrations. The *Commercial Appeal* went further: it justified the court order by resurrecting a familiar specter. "In the face of mounting Memphis truances [that are] tied directly to the garbage strike and the civil unrest," the paper said in an editorial, "the application of the order is due. Otherwise, you condone anarchy."[79]

Paternalistic attitudes appeared in a number of stories. In March alone, the *Commercial Appeal* printed four stories concerning the funds provided by the city government and other public agencies to pay for food stamps for the black strikers. And on March 8, the *Press-Scimitar* believed it necessary to reiterate the facts of Loeb's gesture of keeping in force the life insurance policies of the striking city employees and providing money from the city treasury to pay for their food stamps.[80]

As the crisis deepened, however, some contradictory signals began to appear. In late February and early March, the two papers provided unwavering support of Loeb. A compelling example was their handling of a letter written by Loeb and sent to the strikers on February 28. Loeb offered little in the way of a compromise, but the newspapers accorded his letter a deference seldom given to documents of state. Both of the newspapers printed the full text of the letter, and the *Press-Scimitar* even had Loeb's signature enlarged and affixed to the end of the text.[81]

Within three weeks, however, there were indications in news columns that the papers' support of Loeb was beginning to crack. Stories reported that some members of the city council were becoming restless because of the impasse. Other articles cited fears of racial turmoil and concern about budget problems because of the cost of paying overtime to policemen assigned to demonstrations. Particularly striking was a story, labeled a news analysis, published March 12 by the *Commercial Appeal*:

> Outside the narrow issues of the sanitation workers' strike, the ministers often say [that] this is only part of a broad spectrum of grievances in the Negro Community . . .
>
> . . . The leadership role assumed by the Negro ministers is familiar in the civil rights movement, the best example being Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.[82]

The *Commercial Appeal* had clearly acknowledged the two central changes in what had been a simple strike. The timing of the article explains a great deal about what it said. Two days later, Roy Wilkins, the executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and Bayard Rustin, the tactical organizer of the 1963

March on Washington, kept their previously scheduled speaking enagagements at a rally in Memphis. Add to that the fact that Loeb was as stubborn as ever. On the same day that Wilkins and Rustin made their speeches, Loeb declared that, faced with another situation similar to the strike, "'I wouldn't do a single thing differently.'"[83] Two days later, the *Commercial Appeal*'s patience with Loeb ran out:

> It is time, then, that the city council, or some other agency sensitive to the emotional dangers besetting the tranquility of the entire community, move toward bringing about an equitable formula for settlement.
>
> . . . The council should take the responsibility of seeking a solution to the entire problem. The city probably has won the battle. It might lose the war.[84]

Four days after the *Commercial Appeal* reversed itself, the same thought struck the *Press-Scimitar*. Its recommendation was that the council, "which is the policy-making branch of city government, could assert itself by adopting some sort of policy that would remove this thorn from the flesh of the community."[85]

As a matter of politics, it was not so surprising that the newspapers disavowed Loeb. Both endorsed more moderate candidates during the first round of the mayoral race. When Loeb and incumbent Mayor William Ingram ended up in the run-off, Loeb got the papers' endorsements, but only as the lesser of evils. The strike changed that. Loeb became the leading player in a morality tale of good and evil. Now pragmatism began to produce second thoughts. First Wilkins and Rustin showed up. Then there was an unmistakable sign that the crisis could grow rapidly into something uncomfortably close to another Birmingham. Two days before the *Press-Scimitar* published its editorial, Martin Luther King, Jr., arrived in Memphis to deliver a speech at a rally for the union. His presence at a union rally would have been enough to force a harder look at Loeb and the strike. But what he said signaled that worse could be coming. He urged the union men and their sympathizers to call a general work stoppage if it was necessary to win the garbage strike. The Martin Luther King who spoke in Memphis in 1968 was both grimmer and more radical than the nonviolent conquerer of Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma. King had traveled far afield since the days of the old Southern movement, and his energies were being expended in causes that were far more controversial than pulling down Jim Crow.

King had ventured into the North in 1966. As the head of the Chicago Freedom Movement, he took on the political machine of Mayor Richard Daley in a campaign directed primarily against segregated housing patterns that were as rigidly — if unofficially — fixed as any in the South. Daley outmaneuvered King, and the Chicago Freedom Movement ended as a disastrous failure. He had become a critic of the American war in Vietnam, speaking out fairly mildly in 1965, then in the bitterest of terms in 1967, and on both occasions he had reaped a harvest of criticism in turn. In 1968, King was preparing to embark on his most ambitious and most radical campaign. It was to be a class-structured social move-

ment, recruiting into its ranks the major groupings of the poor — American Indians, Hispanic Americans, and impoverished whites and blacks. A gathering of the underclass under King's banner would have been radical enough, but what he proposed to do was more radical still. The Poor People's Campaign would push Gandhian nonviolence to its philosophical limits by using civil disobedience and civil disruption on a massive scale. King's target now was the national government. The leaders of the federal government, indeed the white establishment of America, would be forced to put the programs in place and find the money necessary to relieve the misery of the poor. If they did not, the consequences envisioned by King would be grim: the major cities of the country would be crippled by massive, though nonviolent disruption.[86]

King's involvement in the strike in Memphis started as a minor, if familiar type of engagement. He was persuaded to make a speech by his old associate Lawson. If not yet a failure, the strike was a long way from success, and Lawson wanted King's great name and voice to bring the faithful forward in Memphis and attract the kind of national media attention to the strike that only King could deliver. Almost certainly King intended to do little more in Memphis than he had on hundreds of previous occasions since the Montgomery bus boycott of the mid-1950s. Customarily, he would make a speech or two to spur the laggards and bring in the news media before traveling home or to another city and another engagement. Little more could have been demanded by Lawson because King's energies were coopted by the myriad problems of his Poor People's Campaign, then scheduled to begin in a few weeks in Washington.[87]

However, King was surprised and impressed by the large (approximately thirteen thousand persons by the reckoning of a reporter for the *Commercial Appeal*) and enthusiastic crowd that greeted him in Memphis. With an eye cocked to the Poor People's Campaign, he asked those at the "rally to 'make this the beginning of the Washington movement.'"[88] He also made a fateful promise; he would return to lead a protest march on behalf of the strike. The prospect of a major demonstration led by the most charismatic black leader in America was quite enough to prod the Memphis press to the realization that as outsiders go, national union leaders were preferable to Martin Luther King. The *Press-Scimitar*, for example, mixed approximately equal parts of defiance and defensiveness in an editorial directed at this new invader:

> We're not ashamed, Dr. King. We have not done all we have wanted to do, nor even what we should have done. But we're not ashamed.
>
> . . . And if you don't watch out, Dr. King, you and some of your fellow ministers here in Memphis just might undo what already has been accomplished.[89]

Henceforth, as the theme of the outsider was unreeled by the two newspapers, the alien agitator would be King.

King's promise to lead a march produced effects beyond the grumbling of the *Press-Scimitar*. It also led to renewed efforts to resolve the strike. Loeb and the city council and the union and COME agreed to accept the

services of an experienced and respected private mediator. The first attempt to meet was ended by the city government's representatives because the city's attorneys questioned whether there could be negotiations while the injunction remained in force. The judge who issued the injunction quickly gave his consent, but as always there remained the problem of Mayor Henry Loeb.

As a way of settling the strike, mediation was chimerical. Standing in the way was Loeb, for whom the strike came down to a matter of principle, which is to say, face. In his eyes, the garbage strike differed but little from the seizure of the American espionage vessel *Pueblo* by North Koreans earlier in the year. Loeb believed the reponse in both instances should be unyielding stands on principle. Compromise might be the essential force that makes democratic government work, but Loeb equated compromise with weakness, and he believed that "the trouble with this country is weakness in government." Loeb had the power to enforce those views. He appointed and controlled the city government's bargaining team, and, as one of its members later recalled, the mediation sessions were a matter of talk and nothing more until the murder of King forced the city to come to terms with the union.[90]

If there was hope that the strike would be settled before King's death, it resided with thirteen bickering, uncertain members of the city council. But mediation, as a member of that body recalled, "really prevented us from getting down to the guts of the question."[91] And that, of course, was the survival of Local 1733 as a union. A simple matter, really, involving no more than a written agreement and programming the city government's computers to deduct union dues routinely, as was done for school teachers and bus drivers, as was done, for that mater, for a host of other purposes, public and private. But to accomplish those small tasks the council had to brace itself for a showdown with Loeb. It ducked that unpleasant prospect. Several times the council tried to come up with a settlement, but these attempts foundered because a majority of its members was never willing to defy a mayor who insisted publicly that he would not compromise. Even while the mediation was underway, Loeb made it clear that he would not change his mind, and clear away the final sticking point of dues reduction. "'The strike is illegal,'" he proclaimed, "'and you can't deal with illegality.'" Even that statement was not enough to prod the council to move. Not until the following year would the city council muster its courage, assert its power to make policy, and force Loeb to accord routine recogition to unions that could prove they represented city employees.[92] By then, however, its members were chastened by experience and wiser in the ways of city government and Henry Loeb.

The Strike on the National Stage

A massive snowstorm forced the cancellation of the march that King promised to lead. It was rescheduled for March 28. The day before, the negotiators for the union broke off bargaining, complaining that the city government representatives were not coming to the table in good faith.

The complaint was valid, but COME and the union also wanted to make a dramatic gesture that would call attention to the demonstration.

On March 28, approximately five thousand persons assembled near the church that served as the strike headquarters for a march to city hall. The demonstration was organized by the black ministers of COME, not by King's staff, which had far more experience with such tasks. COME botched the job. Parade marshals with bullhorns issued contradictory and confusing instructions to the milling crowd. Heavy sticks were issued to marchers; they bore placards but became weapons when trouble erupted. To make it worse, King was late. Rumors swept through the waiting demonstrators that a black high school student had been killed or seriously injured by police. When King finally arrived, enthusiastic and curious demonstrators swarmed around the automobile that brought him from the airport, and it took some time to sort out and put the crowd in marching order and get underway.[93]

A few blocks into the march the trouble started. A number of young black demonstrators began breaking windows and looting stores lining the street. Police moved in immediately, but not only against looters; demonstrators and innocent bystanders were beaten or sprayed with Mace as well.[94] More than sixty people were injured during and after the demonstration, and more than two hundred others were arrested. Soon after, a black youth was killed by policemen whose story, disputed by some witnesses, was that he attacked them with a knife.

President Johnson announced he was prepared to dispatch federal troops to restore order, but his offer of assistance was rejected. Thirty-eight hundred Tennesse National Guardsmen were sent into Memphis. A strict curfew and patrols by the troops and police restored order. Memphis took on the atmosphere of an armed camp, not just because of the rioting but also the lack of experience that would put the disorders in perspective. Even the director of the fire and police departments was unnerved. He characterized the riot as a "war in the city of Memphis." By the bloody standards of Watts, Detroit, or Newark, the "war" was, however, no more than a minor flare-up.

Minor or not, the disorders were read as a portent of the coming Poor People's Campaign. Gerold Frank summed up the position in which King found himself after March 28:

> He must return to Memphis for another march. It had to be peaceful. The entire Poor People's Campaign depended upon it. "If we don't have a peaceful march in Memphis, no Washington" [King said]. Shaken though he was, he was firm: "No Memphis, no Washington."[95]

King was nothing if not realistic. The pressure was on. He was accused of cowardice because his aides spirited him away from the march after the window-breaking and looting started. Much of the white establishment, ranging from the *New York Times* to President Johnson (who appeared on television to denounce "mindless violence"), was hostile to the Poor People's Campaign. The response from black America was no more encouraging. The conservative NAACP expressed doubts about the Washinton project, a backhanded way of saying that the NAACP

wanted it abandoned. From the left, Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell was rechristening the winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace as "Martin Loser King." So great was the outcry that King felt it necessary to cancel a trip to Africa, where he had planned to serve as a mediator in the bloody civil war between the central government of Nigeria and the Biafran rebels.[96]

Doubts expressed elsewhere in the nation about King, Gandhian nonviolence, and the Washington campaign surfaced also in the pages of the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar*. Their attention nevertheless remain fixed on the situation in Memphis. Two major themes surfaced again with renewed force, the demand that public order be maintained and the idea that outside agitators were producing unrest among blacks. Not since the first stage of the garbage strike had those themes been presented so strongly.

Somewhat, surprisingly, the *Press-Scimitar*, which had argued most vehemently that strict police controls should be imposed on the demonstration led by King, also provided the more balanced coverage of the events of March 28. Its news stories generally presented police officers in a favorable light, but a series of first-person reports by individual journalists provided ample details of brutal or improper conduct by some policemen. The paper chose, however, to ignore its own stories. It published an editorial that maintained that those who started the trouble "got what they asked for from a determined police force." As proof of police restrain, the *Press-Scimitar* offered these statistics: only one person killed; only sixty people injured.[97]

Missing from the *Commercial Appeal* were accounts of misconduct by policemen. Instead, the paper almost uniformly depicted them in favorable ways. In one account, for example, an elderly black man was led from the scene of violence by a policeman who gently scolded him: "'This isn't the place for you elderly people — you ought to be home today.'"[98] Still not satisfied, the *Commercial Appeal* made its larger point, quite familiar by now, in an editorial:

> . . . The anarchy which threatened yesterday was contained . . . by the swift action of police, sheriff's deputies, state troopers, and National Guard, and by the ministers who tried to cool their followers. Memphis continues to have law and order. We can have no less.
>
> . . . We know who is agitating for more trouble and who is trying to restore calm.[99]

The *Commercial Appeal* could well afford to spare a word or two of praise for the black clergy of COME. It was after bigger game, this being Martin Luther King, even if his name did not appear in that ominously worded sentence. Equally sure of the agitator's identity, the *Press-Scimitar* was more open, accusing King of meddling in affairs that were not his concern.[100] Its commentary was restrained, however, when measured against a guest editorial from the *Dallas Morning News* that the *Commercial Appeal* used to mount a savage attack on King:

> Well, the headline-hunting high priest of nonviolence has done it again. This time, thanks to one of his press-agent protests, a local

> garbage strike has exploded into a full-fledged outbreak of racial violence, replete with looting, tear gas, mass arrests, dozens injured, one dead, and a timely duckout by the marching militant himself, Martin Luther King.[101]

That last element — King's departure from the march once trouble started — was a morsel too choice to discard. Both papers — the *Press-Scimitar* less stridently — accused King of cowardice. King, according to the *Commercial Appeal*, "wrecked his reputation as a leader when he took off at high speed when violence occurred, instead of trying to use his persuasive prestige to stop it." In a gossipy journalistic aside, the newspaper also labeled the incident cuttingly as "Chicken a la King."[102]

If the attacks from the Memphis press registered with King, no doubt they were part of a pattern of critical media coverage. As much and more was being said against him by media elsewhere in the nation. Immense pressure was building to cancel the Poor People's Campaign, and the SCLC itself was shaken. After meeting all day on March 30, the organization's executive committee felt compelled to reassure the staff that King was no coward, that he had been physically forced to leave the line of march, and that the violence in Memphis was the work of young people who "felt ignored by some adult community leaders." But King was determined to keep his Washington campaign on track. To do that, he would have to go back to Memphis, but the march he would lead there would not be allowed to overshadow the immensely greater enterprise, the Poor People's Campaign.[103]

King did return to Memphis on April 3, five days before he was scheduled to lead a second march. The city government filed suit in federal court for an injunction against the march, and the judge ordered hearings held. That was not King's only problem. He still had to deal with the young militants. Members of his staff were already at work, attempting to persuade the younger and more militant blacks that the way of nonviolence, from which they had strayed on March 28, was more effective than violence. To do that, the staff members needed King — his enormous prestige, of course, but also his singular ability to assemble people of differing views, disputatious personalities and egos to match, and to somehow get them to work together. He had managed the trick before under circumstances equally as trying, and probably was on the verge of doing it again in Memphis.

They also needed King's unmatched skills as a speaker to keep up the enthusiasm for the cause. They got it in full measure. On the night of April 3, King delivered one of the finest speeches of his career, matching the eloquence of his "I have a dream" peroration at the 1963 March on Washington. In it King seemed to foretell his own death. He evoked Biblical images of a prophet who had climbed to the mountaintop: "And I've looked over and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land." And he closed in a crescendo that brought the audience cheering and weeping to its feet: "So I'm happy tonight, I'm not worried about anything, I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!"[104] His prophecy, if such it was, was

correct; he would not live to enter the Promised Land.

King was staying in a black motel near downtown Memphis. In the late afternoon of April 4, he was standing on the motel balcony waiting to travel to a friend's home for dinner. Across the street, from a bathroom on the second floor of a shabby roominghouse, a sniper fired a shot that ended King's life.

Civil disorders exploded on the streets of many of the major cities on the night of his death and continued to erupt for some days after; more than 130 cities in twenty-nine states were affected. The casualty list rose to forty-six deaths, more than seven thousand injuries, more than twenty thousand arrests, with property damages estimated at approximately one hundred million dollars. The rioting was "on a scale never before experienced in the United States." In Memphis, into which Tennessee National Guardsmen were sent again, the toll was relatively light: one man killed, a number of injured, and more than two hundred arrests.[105]

The murder demanded action on the part of the national government. One of the most intense manhunts in modern American history was set in motion. It ended June 8 with the arrest in London of James Earl Ray, who had escaped from a Missouri prison in 1967. Ray subsequently pleaded guility to the murder of King. A period of mourning was declared for King; the obsequies amounted to a state funeral in all but name. A week after his death, Congress passed and President Johnson later signed into law a civil rights bill that, among other provisions, prohibited discrimination in housing.

The Memphis strike also demanded action by the federal government. Johnson put pressure on Loeb until he agreed to accept the services of a federal mediator. Undersecretary of Labor James Reynolds drew the assignment. After Reynolds arrived on April 6, the negotiations resumed. Anxious to get the strike settled, Johnson called Reynolds several times to learn what progress was being made. Finally, ten days after Reynold's arrival, the city government and the union ratified an agreement.

The terms did not differ substantially from compromises proposed at one point or another during the strike. There was a contract, identified as a memorandum of agreement, and a dues deduction procedure that was to be administered through the credit union of city government employees. These provisos were a sop to Loeb, allowing him to save face by maintaining that he had not signed a contract with the union or committed the city government to collect its dues. Aside from those provisions, the contract provided for a pay increase of fifteen cents per hour, to which the city council had agreed during the first phase of the strike; clauses covering grienvance procedures and nondiscrimination stipulations; and a fair-promotions policy.[106]

Following King's murder, the Memphis dailies were responsible for posting substantial rewards for the arrest of his killer,[107] they raised their editorial voices in a call for a settlement, and started to examine with some seriousness black grievances — police brutality being one — that they had ignored or passed over hurriedly in the past. At the same time, they essentially regarded ending the strike as a way of restoring

things as they had been. The *Press-Scimitar*, for example, predicted a "New Era in Memphis," but it doggedly clung to the paternalism of the past:

> Some Negro leaders, protesting hate and unfairness, have continued to speak hatefully of Mayor Henry Loeb, giving him no credit for providing $15,000 in food stamps to help feed the sanitation men's families, . . . no credit for arranging . . . not to cut off utilities at strikers' homes, . . . nor for obtaining two extensions of the group insurance policy that covers the strikers.
>
> Yet this is the man — head of the city government — to whom the union and Negro leaders have had to — and must still look for betterment of the workers' conditions.[108]

Indeed much of that was true, but the workmen would not go hat in hand. The garbage collectors had their union, and they could bargain with Loeb or with others in the city government from a position of power, thus equality. That uncomfortable fact seemed to escape the *Press-Scimitar* — no doubt the *Commercial Appeal* as well.

Another, more important lesson escaped the two papers. In the final analysis, the strike was bound up in a conflict between old and new orders in Memphis, the latter being created fitfully out of a rising sense of deprivation in the black community. It mattered far less that thirteen hundred men struck against the city government than that they became symbols embodying the greivances of black Memphis. It mattered most, of course, that black Memphis won.

A different sort of union emerged from the victory. Despite its fractious politics, Memphis found a solidarity that endured after the end of the strike. Over the next few years, it re-emerged along with new causes bound up in race — the unionization of black workers at municipal hospitals and the provision of seats for blacks on the city's board of education, to cite two major examples. Then the long lines of marchers would reappear, winding through downtown Memphis toward the white-marble city hall, there to lay new grievances before what the *Commercial Appeal* identified as "the people's government."

Conclusion

A number of factors shaped the events of the sixty-five days in Memphis. Not least was the sense of social, economic, and political deprivation among blacks in Memphis. In many respects, it resembled the sense of deprivation that had gripped black Americans with such force in the middle and later years of the decade. In one critical aspect, it was different. Henry Loeb's election as mayor demonstrated that black political power in Memphis could be overridden by a united white vote for a man whom blacks considered an enemy. The most telling evidence of the sense of deprivation was the fact that it did not dissipate but came to the forefront in other campaigns over the next few years. Taken alone, however, the sense of deprivation does not explain why the strike mobilized and channeled the frustrations of black Memphis.

In the beginning, there were the critical contributions of the principal

figures of the strike. Among these were the poor judgment of national union officers, specifically P.J. Ciampa, who acted in accord with the give-and-take of collective bargaining and in utter ignorance of the dictates of the culture in which he found himself; the obduracy of Henry Loeb, whose conviction that he, not the workmen, knew their best interests, was both paternalistic and arrogant; and, of course, the timidity, bordering on cowardice, of the majority of the city council, which was unable to bring itself to meet its responsibility to make policy for the city government.

Still, the strike was by no means a unique event at the start. Dozens of American cities — though few in the South, where organized labor was weak — had experienced strikes that were as long and as marked by bitter rhetoric, and in the end these produced little more than passing inconvenience for citizens. Only in terms of the meanings attached to the strike — especially in the morality tales spun by the two newspapers — does it begin to make sense.

Contraposing symbols dominated the strike during its critical first stage. These were P.J. Ciampa, Mayor Henry Loeb, and the black strikers. Before he vanished from the public stage, Ciampa was a symbol of immense power in the culture. He was the latter-day carpetbagger, at least as painted by the newspapers. But Ciampa was no solitary symbol; beside him on the public stage managed by the newspaper stood Henry Loeb. Ciampa would exploit the black garbage collectors; Loeb would protect them, even if it meant protecting them from themselves.

Running beneath this paternalistic code was another, darker vision. If Loeb protected the black workers from outsiders, he also would protect whites in Memphis from anarchy, that is, from servile insurrection set in motion by outsiders agitating the blacks. *Maintain public order*, that was the recurring demand of the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar*. To be sure, these were volatile times; the urban disorders in many major American cities had given rise to apprehensions of black violence across the nation. In Memphis, there was a particular twist. Such fears were rooted as well in the terror of revolts, actual and potential, that dominated the psyche of the slave South. Eternal vigilance was the price demanded of a culture based on slavery, and its vestigial element appeared in the approving words pronounced by the two newspapers when draconian measures were taken at the first sign of trouble.

While the themes of the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar* tapped the enormous power of culture concepts, the force moved in opposite directions. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the media image of Henry Loeb. Loeb could be interpreted by whites as a heroic leader, resisting the invaders, benevolently protecting the black man, and at the same time guaranteeing by his firmness and decisiveness that the black man would not be permitted to rise in bloody rebellion. Blacks read Loeb in another light, as plantation owner-reincarnate. Given Loeb's record — first enjoying black support, then losing it after declaring his sympathies with segregation, finally spurning black voters in the 1967 mayoral election campaign — that interpretation was all but in-

escapable in black Memphis.

Yet Loeb, like Ciampa, did not stand alone. Arrayed against Loeb were the faceless ranks of the garbage collectors, the men who, as the minister explained, had the jobs that nobody wanted. As sketched by the newspapers, they were misguided and ignorant laborers who lacked the capacity to determine for themselves their best interests. Black Memphis read them differently. Yet they moved black Memphis not as union men, not even black union men; rather, they became symbols in which were bound up grievances far weightier than the recogition of Local 1733 as a bargaining agent for a segment of the city government's work force. The real cause was forcing Loeb to recognize black Memphis, as, for example, he had refused to do while campaigning for mayor.

Thus, the critical turning point came in black Memphis, where the papers were not ignored. Certainly the two newspapers cannot be dismissed as voices lost in the babble of modern mass media, as was demonstrated by the two boycotts. Black men and women thus were moved by the power of culturally significant themes — but, more critically, they were moved in a direction opposite that intended by the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar*.

To be sure, blacks were moved in this direction as well by COME. Commanding more than one hundred pulpits was no small matter in itself, because COME's message could be communicated to blacks independent of mass media. As they had numerous times in the Southern civil rights movement, the black clergy demonstrated their ability to mobilize their flocks for social causes. Still, COME was not organized until after the strike had begun moving from labor to racial issue, and the collective influence of the black clergy had not yet had time to register decisively.

What the papers said was most telling in the first phase of the strike. Obviously, the strike required definition, not least because it was begun so soon after the new government was inaugurated. It could have been defined as what it was, a mundane labor dispute. The *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar* defined it culturally, the critical point being the concordance of the themes and concepts that historically had ordered experience in Southern culture.

The newspapers later rejected Loeb's leadership, urging the city council to come forward and resolve the crisis. It was too little, too late. Once loosed, the power of the culture concepts could not be easily or quickly contained. And, in fact, the newspapers did not fully reverse course. Even while urging the council to bypass Loeb and settle the strike, the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar* continued to develop the themes of black anarchy and paternalism and, with King's appearance in Memphis, of the outside agitator. The events of the garbage strike were rushing with such rapidity that the *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar* never quite caught up with them — or, indeed, with their full meaning.

After March 28, the strike was transformed once more. The clergy, the union men, the city administration, the Memphis press now mattered little. The window-breaking and looting during the march led by King abruptly propelled the strike onto the national stage. Violence in Mem-

phis, so the notion went, meant there would be violence when King started his Poor People's Campaign in the nation's capital. A minor strike was approaching the dimensions of a national crisis; certainly a crisis for King, who had to delay his plans for his most radical movement in order to return to Memphis to lead another march. Finally, on April 4, the strike became a national trauma with the murder of King and the rioting that reached into every region of the nation. To end that trauma, President Johnson intervened, putting pressure on Loeb that produced a settlement. Sixty-five days after it began, tragically on terms that differed little from compromises promised earlier, the Memphis garbage strike came to an end.

NOTES

1. Benjamin Muse, *Memphis* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1964), p. 48.

2. See, e.g., David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981); Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumphet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982); David M. Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump: Bossism, Blacks, and Civic Reformers, 1948-1968* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980), and *Black Pastors and Leaders: Memphis, 1819-1972* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1975); and F. Ray Marshall and Arvil V. Adams, "The Memphis Public Employees Strike," in W. Ellison Chalmers and Gerald W. Cormick, eds., *Racial Conflict and Negotiations* (Ann Arbor: Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, 1971), pp. 71-107.

3. Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, 2nd ed. (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1967), pp. 296, 304; James Carey, "Journalism and Criticism: The Case of an Undeveloped Profession," *The Review of Politics* 36: 245 (April 1974). See also Hugh Dalziel Duncan, *Communication and Social Order* (New York: The Bedminster Press, 1962), p. 144.

4. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 312.

5. Duncan, p. 119, n. 9; Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 5.

6. An approach suggested indirectly by the British sociologist Stuart Hall during a seminar at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, April 20, 1984. I have modified it, however, to argue that culture concepts may impel different groups in different directions with approximately equal force.

The voluminous literature touching on culture concepts is, of course, primarily anthropological. Among the works I found most useful are Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, "The Idea of Power in Japanese Culture," and Clifford Geertz, "Afterword: The Politics of Meaning," in *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. by Claire Holt, with the assistance of Benedict R. O'G. Anderson and James Siegel (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 1-69, and 319-335, respectively; and Roy G. D'Andrade, "Cultural Meaning Systems," in Richard A Shweder and Robert A. LeVine, eds., *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 88-119. Useful for the historian's point of view are Arthur F. Wright, "On the Uses of Generalization in the Study of Chinese History," and Derk Bodde, "Comments on the Paper of Arthur F. Wright," in Louis Gottschalk, ed., *Generalizations in the Writing of History: A Report of the Committee on Historical Analysis of the Social Science Research Council* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 36-58, and 59-65, respectively. Among the concepts discussed is the concept of the centrality of Chinese civilization, political, cultural, and geographical.

The notion of culture concepts must be handled with some care, not least because they are often marked by inherent contradictions. In addition, as Bodde points out, some may have wide currency while others may be more or less restricted to certain groups within a culture, and, of course, their force may vary from epoch to epoch.

7. Muse, pp. 2, 31-42, *passim*.

8. Voter registration statistics are cited in Thomas Beebe Ripy, Jr., "Changes in the Formal Structure of Municipal Government and Their Effect on Selected Aspects of the Legislative Process: A Case Study of Memphis, Tennessee," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1973, p. 96. The critical role played by black voters in the referendum on the mayor-council form of government is discussed by Jonathan I. Wax, "Program of Progress: The Recent Change in the Form of Government in Memphis," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 23: 93-94 (1969). For a more general appreciation of black politics in Memphis, see Harry Holloway, "Negro Political Strategy: Coalition or Independent Power Politics?" *Social Science Quarterly* 49: 534-547 (December 1968), a comparison of black political organization and strategy in Memphis and two other Southern cities. The best general treatment of Memphis politics in the post-Crump era is Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump*.

9. Interview with C. Eric Lincoln, 11 November 1971, transcript of tape 193, p. 7, Sanitation Strike archives, Mississippi Valley Collection, Brister Library, Memphis State University, pp. 17-19. (Material from the archives hereafter identified as MVC.) In 1964, the Memphis chapter of the NAACP, with 7,000 members, was the largest in the South. Muse, p. 6. Black leaders cancelled demonstrations scheduled for the summer of 1967 lest these cause a white backlash in the upcoming election in which a black politiican was a candidate for mayor. Arthur Crowns, Jr., "A Case Study of Police Relations During the Hot Summer of 1967 in Memphis, Tennessee," unpublished ms., n.d., MVC.

10. Some details of racial problems in organized labor in Memphis are cited in Ray Marshall, *The Negro and Organized Labor* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1965), pp. 178-179. Lukewarm support provided the black strikers by other unions in Memphis is mentioned in an interview with Taylor Blair, 13 September 1968, transcript of tape 31, p. 23, MVC. Blair was an officer of an electrical workers' union in Memphis. The quotation is from Richard J. Murphy and Morris Sackman, eds., *The Crisis in Public Employee Relations in the Decade of the Seventies: Proceedings of a Seminar Conducted by the Public Employee Relations Center* (Washington: The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc., 1970), p. 103.

11. For a brief sketch of various attempts to organize the garbage collectors, see interview with T.O. Jones, 30 January 1970, transcript of tape 228, pp. 11-15, passim, MVC. Jones was president of Local 1733 during the 1968 strike. A white lawyer, who later represented the union, recalled that AFSCME President Jerry Wurf believed the strike was ill-timed, because cool February weather made uncollected garbage less annoying than it would have been during the summer, and ill-conceived, because it occurred before opposition had a chance to build up to an administration that had just taken office. Interview with David Caywood, 20 May 1968, transcript of tape 141, p. 25, MVC. See also interview with Jesse Epps, 31 July 1968 transcript of tape 123, p. 17, MVC, for essentially the same assessment from a field representative sent to Memphis by AFSCME.

12. The quotation is from Muse, p. 26. The papers' editorial positions during earlier racial crises are analyzed by Hugh Davis Graham, *Crisis in Print: Desegregation and the Press in Tennessee* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), especially pp. 196-199.

13. On demonstrations held in the early 1960s, see Tucker, *Black Pastors and Leaders*, pp. 114-118, *passim*. The quotation appears in an interview with Lucius Burch, 3 September 1968, transcript of tape 88, pp. 25-26, MVC. Burch, a liberal white lawyer, represented King in a strike-related case in federal court in 1968.

14. Social commentators as early as Tocqueville have been struck by the power generated when expectations of social change are not matched by change itself. Here the more modern term is taken from Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 46.

15. *Commercial Appeal*, 3 November 1967, p. 1; interview with Lewis R. Donelson, 29 June 1968, transcript of tape 45, p. 4, MVC. Donelson was one of the ten white members of the city council in 1968.

16. See "Hambone's Meditations," *Commercial Appeal*, 25 March 1968, p. 17. After the strike, the cartoon was dropped. The boycott against the *Commercial Appeal* is briefly discussed by the paper's editor in an interview with Frank R. Ahlgren, 14 August 1972, transcript of tape 334, pp. 24-25, MVC.

17. The *Commercial Appeal*'s total circulation was 224,000; the *Press Scimitar*'s 134,000. See market analyses issued by Standard Rate and Data Service, Inc., *Newspapers*

Rates and Data (Skokie, Ill., 12 August 1968), n.p., and *1968-69 SRDS Newspaper Circulation Analysis* (Skokie, Ill., 1969), pp. B291-292. The former reports the Audit Bureau of Circulation's estimate of the number of households in Memphis in 1968. The Research Libraries of the New York Public Library graciously provided extracts from the reports. On Memphis broadcasting stations, see the market analysis issued by Television Digest, Inc., *Television Factbook, 1969-70* (Washington, 1970), pp. 708B-711B, and Standard Rate and Data Service, Inc., *Spot Radio Rates and Data* (Wilmette, Ill., 1 March 1984), pp. 639-641, which lists the year that radio stations went on the air. Because no earlier report could be located, the number of radio stations operating in Memphis during the strike is an estimate.

18. Ripy studied political campaigns before and after the 1968 strike. He found that the *Commercial Appeal* endorsed twenty-two winners in twenty-eight races and the *Press-Scimitar* twenty-one successful candidated in thirty elections. He added that Memphis politicians may have been confusing influence with the newspapers' ability to predict the outcome of elections. Ripy, pp. 63, 118, 135. More salient is Robert A. Dahl's observation that press influence upon decision-makers depends upon politicians' belief in the actual or potential effect of newspapers on voters. *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 259. On the role of the Memphis press in the campaign to restructure the city government, see Jonathan I. Wax, "Program of Progress: The Recent Change in the Form of Government in Memphis," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 23: 18 (1969); and 24: 93 (1970). See also, Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump*, pp. 112-113, who takes a longer view of this reform campaign.

19. Speech by Lewis R. Donelson, n.d., document file, MVC.

20. How radical a departure is best illustrated by the statement of the federal mediator sent to Memphis by President Johnson after King's death: "Well, the first thing we're going to do is . . . cut off the television cameras. And we're going to stop the public statements and posturing on the news media." Interview with James Reynolds, 4 February 1972, transcript of tape 310, p. 8, MVC. See also interview with Jerry Wurf, 3 February 1972, transcript of tape 305, p. 27, MVC.

21. The factor of wages is discussed by Robert E. Bailey, "The 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike," M.A. thesis, Memphis State University, 1974, pp. 20-21. See *ibid.*, p. 22, for an account of the accidental deaths. An officer of AFSCME maintained that the deaths caused T.O. Jones to lose control of Local 1733 because of pressure from the rank and file: ". . . the thing just got away from him. Then he had to run to stay out in front." Interview with P.J. Ciampa, 3 February 1972, transcript of tape 309, p. 42, MVC.

22. T.O. Jones estimated that only ten to twenty-five members of the local actually paid the union dues of four dollars per month before a dues deduction procedure was established. Jones interview, pp. 5-8, *passim*.

23. In anthropological terms, more properly a subculture or cultural variant. I prefer the less clumsy "culture," even though it sacrifices some precision.

24. For a discussion of the siege mentality, see Frank E. Vandiver, "The Southerner as Extremist," in Frank E. Vandiver, ed., *The Idea of the South: Pursuit of a Central Theme* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press for Rice University, 1964), especially p. 46. For a sociologist's perspective, see Lewis M. Killian, *White Southerners* (New York: Random House, 1970), pp. 14-65, *passim*. The Southern response to abolitionism is ably analyzed by Clement Eaton, *A History of the Old South*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), pp. 337-356, *passim*.

25. That view coincided with the sentiments of Loeb and some others in the city government. See *Press-Scimitar*, 12 February 1968, p. 6; *Commecial Appeal*, 13 February 1968, p. 8.

26. Wurf complained that the strike was begun without preparation but that it was intolerable to cancel it after the injunction was issued. Wurf interview, transcript of tape 256, p. 20, MVC. On the 1966 strike, see Jones interview, tape 228, p. 33, and Pete Sisson [commissioner of public works in 1966] to Richard Lentz, 13 August 1975. Undersecretary of Labor James Reynolds, who later served as a mediator in the strike, described the leaders of Local 1733, as "frightfully inept [and] . . . extremely limited in their ability even to negotiate the basic terms of the contract." Reynolds interview, p. 27, MVC. The parent union subsidized Local 1733 by paying its president $425 per month for wages and expenses. See *City of Memphis v. Local 1733 of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees et al.*, Chancery Court of Shelby County, Tennessee. Transcript

of Vol. I, pp. 372-374.

27. *Press-Scimitar*, 14 February 1968, pp. 1, 27.

28. Interview with Downing Pryor, 8 May 1968, transcript of tape 50, p. 6, MVC.

29. Ciampa interview, pp. 7, 18-19. The meeting at which Loeb encountered the jeers of the union men is mentioned by Bailey, pp. 32-33, and the *Commercial Appeal*, 14 February 1968, p. 1.

30. On February 16, two days after the meeting of Ciampa and Loeb, a Memphis television station posed this question in an informal poll: "Should the city recognize the sanitation workers' union?" No attempt was made to draw a representative sample; "yes" and "no" opinions were recorded automatically when viewers dialed designated telephone numbers. Because of its methodological flaws, the survey cannot be taken as proof of a division of opinion along racial lines. It is indicative, however, of the intense feelings aroused during the first week of the strike, and the most likely explanation is that these can be traced to the reports of the meeting of Loeb and Ciampa. There were 20,595 responses to the question, the largest number of responses to any question posed during the four months that the poll was operating. The total was more than triple the average response (6,112) for all questions, and was more than double the response to other questions related to the garbage strike later raised by the poll. M.E. Greiner, Jr., manager of WMC broadcasting stations, to Richard Lentz, 23 January 1976, author's files, and "Information Report," WMC Television, Memphis, 19 February 1968, MVC.

31. Gaye Tuchman discusses the use of quotation marks as discrediting devices in "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity," *American Journal of Sociology* 77: 668-671 (January 1972).

32. *Commercial Appeal*, 16 February 1968, p. 6.

33. Don Oberdorfer, *Tet!* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), pp. 4-5, 20, 343-346.

34. *Commercial Appeal*, 18 February 1968, p. 6.

35. *Press-Scimitar*, 15 February 1968, p. 12.

36. Wurf interview, transcript of tape 256, p. 25, MVC.

37. *Ibid.*, transcript of tape 305, p. 28, MVC.

38. *Commercial Appeal*, 13 February 1968, p. 15. Earlier, Jones was described in an unpublished memorandum as a "shifty character who frequently changes his telephone number and address . . ." Charles Thornton to metropolitan desk of the *Commercial Appeal*, 10 February 1968, author's files.

39. *Commercial Appeal*, 13 February 1968, p. 6.

40. *Ibid.*, 16 February 1968, p. 6. See also 20 February 1968, p. 6.

41. *Press-Scimitar*, 16 March 1968; p. 1; *Commercial Appeal*, 15 March 1968, p. 23.

42. *Press-Scimitar*, 16 February 1968, p. 11.

43. *Ibid.*, 23 February 1968, p. 1.

44. Caywood interview, p. 16

45. *Commercial Appeal*, 15 February 1968, p. 6. In fact, the evidence indicates that the city government had the authority to negotiate with the union even under the terms of the injunction entered during the 1966 strike. See *City of Memphis v. Local 1733, American Federation of State County, and Municipal Employees et al.*, Chancery Court of Shelby County, Tennessee, opinion of the court, p. 3.

46. *Press-Scimitar*, 6 April 1968, p. 5. In the first days of the strike the *Commercial Appeal* did quote a union representative's claim that AFSCME had contracts with several cities and the state government of Tennessee that permitted dues deductions. 16 February 1968, p. 1.

47. See, e.g., *Commercial Appeal*, 14 February 1968, p. 19.

48. John P. Bakke, "A Climate of Violence: A Study in the Rhetoric of the Establishment," unpublished ms., n.d., chapter 4, p. 5, MVC. *Commercial Appeal*, 18 February 1968, p. 18.

49. Donelson interview, pp. 16-18, and interview with Jerred Blanchard, 27 May 1968, transcript of tape 67, pp. 12-13, MVC. Blanchard was another white member of the city council.

50. Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump*, p. 141. On assistance provided by black clergy early in the strike, see *Commercial Appeal*, 17 February 1968, p. 1.

51. *Commercial Appeal*, 23 February 1968, p. 1. The article was written by the author of this monograph.

52. *Commercial Appeal*, 23 February 1968, p. 6.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Press-Scimitar*, 22 February 1968, pp. 1, 4, 6.
55. Bailey, pp. 49-50. The white politician, Lewis Donelson, apparently expected that Wurf would inform the union members that the full council would not approve the resolution adopted by the public works committee. Had Wurf done so, he would have left himself open to accusations of collaborating with city officials because members of Local 1733 were obviously in no mood to end their sit-in without some encouraging sign from the committee.
56. *Commercial Appeal*, 23 February 1968, p. 6.
57. Donelson interview, p. 20.
58. *Press-Scimitar*, 23 February 1968, p. 1.
59. Edelman, p. 76.
60. Blanchard interview, p. 17.
61. See Bailey, pp. 59-60; J. Edwin Stanfield, *In Memphis: More Than a Garbage Strike* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1968), pp. 9-11; *Tri-State Defender*, 2 March 1968, p. 13; *Commercial Appeal*, 24 February 1968, pp. 1, 3.
62. Quoted in Stanfield, p. 33.
63. *Commercial Appeal*, 24 February 1968, p. 6.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
65. *Press-Scimitar*, 24 February 1968, pp. 1, 3.
66. *Ibid.*; *Commercial Appeal*, 24 February 1968, p. 3.
67. See photographs and story, *Tri-State Defender*, 2 March 1968, pp. 1, 13; *Press-Scimitar*, 24 February 1968, pp. 1, 3.
68. See interviews with Frank Gianotti, 10 May 1972, transcript of tape 312, p. 20, and James Manire, 7 August 1968, transcript of tape 43, p. 32, MVC. Gianotti was the city attorney and Manire an assistant city attorney during the strike.
69. *Press-Scimitar*, 24 February 1968, pp. 1, 3; interview with William Lucy, 1 November 1968, transcript of tape 103, p. 19, MVC.
70. Blanchard interview, pp. 12-13; Donelson interview, tape 44, p. 20.
71. Quoted in Gerold Frank, *An American Death* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), p. 69.
72. For details of the political activities of the garbage collectors, see Donelson interview, p. 38. Wages paid to and supervisory positions held by blacks in the sanitation department are described by the *Press-Scimitar*, 16 April 1968, p. 4. Memphis sanitation men ranked about in the middle in terms of the top hourly wages in a survey of nine cities by the *Commercial Appeal*. These were St. Louis, $2.20; Dallas, $1.83; Atlanta and Memphis, $1.80; Nashville, $1.79; Birmingham, $1.60; Little Rock and New Orleans, $1.46; and Jackson, Mississippi, $1.40. See *Commercial Appeal*, 16 February 1968, p. 23.
73. One that comes to mind is that the strike was a fairly mundane affair whose salient issues, signing a contract with a union and establishing dues deduction procedures, would be regarded as mere technical matters in most instances of collective bargaining.
74. Lucy interview, tape 104, p. 3, MVC.
75. Interview with Ed Ray, 23 April 1969, transcript of tape 161, p. 18, MVC. Ray was the managing editor of the *Press-Scimitar*. It is difficult to measure the boycott's true impact; no circulation statistics based on race were located. Combined city circulation of the two papers was 206,000. If blacks subscribed at the same rates as their forty percent of population, circulation among blacks would have been approximately 82,000. The percentage of black circulation probably was far less for a variety of reasons, especially the wide gap between black and white incomes; according to the 1960 census, median income for a black family in Memphis was $2,666, $6,031 for a white family, and the disparity probably was almost as great in 1968. Assuming a minimum circulation loss of 6,000 between the two papers, black circulation probably dropped by at least ten percent, a fairly significant decline given the six weeks or so that the boycott was most effective, i.e., during the strike.
76. *Commercial Appeal*, 28 February 1968, p. 7.
77. *Commercial Appeal*, 31 March 1968, p. 1; *Wall Street Journal*, 8 March 1968, p. 10. The *Journal* estimated that retail sales fell thirty-five percent; the *Commercial Appeal* quoted a city councilman to the effect that sales were off by twenty-five percent. The *Press-Scimitar* mentioned the boycott in passing on March 28, p. 8, while defending its record in civil rights coverage.

78. See *Commercial Appeal*, 6 March 1968, p. 1; 7 March 1968, p. 6; 16 March 1968, p. 6.

79. *Press-Scimitar*, 14 March 1968, pp. 1, 10; *Commercial Appeal*, 17 March 1968; p. 6.

80. *Commercial Appeal*, 6 March 1968, p. 1; 9 March 1968, p. 23; 16 March 1968, p. 25; 27 March 1968, p. 19. *Press-Scimitar*, 8 March 1968, pp. 1, 5. The *Press-Scimitar* also noted that gratuities provided the families of the two men crushed to death in an accident before the strike were approved by Loeb. The story appeared on 9 March 1968, p. 3.

81. *Commercial Appeal*, 29 February 1968, p. 16; *Press-Scimitar*, 29 February 1968, p. 1.

82. *Commercial Appeal*, 12 March 1968, p. 17.

83. *Ibid.*, 15 March 1968, p. 23.

84. *Ibid.*, 16 March 1968, p. 6. See also, 21 March 1968, p. 53

85. *Press-Scimitar*, 20 March 1968, p. 10.

86. The best treatment of the Poor People's Campaign is Charles Fager, *Uncertain Resurrection: The Poor People's Washington Campaign* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969). King's plans for nonviolent disruption are sketched in his speech to the SCLC convention on August 15, 1967 in Atlanta. King Center Archives, Atlanta, Box 28, File 37. His vitriolic critique of the war in 1967 appears in Martin Luther King, Jr., *Speeches by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. about the War in Vietnam* (New York: Clergy and Laymen Concerned about the War in Vietnam, n.d.), King Center archives, Box 28, File 43. The reaction to King's opposition to the war is examined by David L. Lewis, *King: A Biography*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), p. 304, and Harris Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings: Making Sense of the Sixties* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980), p. 221. On the Chicago Freedom Movement, see Lewis, pp. 317-320.

87. The problems included widespread opposition in black America. See, e.g., Milton Viorst, *Fire in the Streets: America in the 1960s* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), pp. 437-438, and Lewis, p. 369. Opposition to the Poor People's Campaign even surfaced in King's own organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. See Marian Logan, assistant secretary of the SCLC, to King, 8 March 1968. Copy provided by David Garrow from his files. Problems with organizing the campaign are discussed by the public relations director of SCLC. See interview with Thomas Offenburger, 2 July 1968, transcript of tape 227, pp. 32-33, oral history collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. Various internal SCLC reports indicate that SCLC staff members were encountering difficulties in recruiting poor people for the project. See Box 178, Files 1-20, *passim*. King Center archives.

88. *Commercial Appeal*, 19 March 1968, p. 1. Offenburger interview, p. 33.

89. *Press-Scimitar*, 21 March 1968, p. 1.

90. Loeb's unwillingness to agree to a settlement is mentioned in the Manire interview, pp. 47-48. Loeb's complaint about weakness in government was reported by the *Commercial Appeal*, 13 March 1968, p. 14.

91. Donelson interview, tape 44a, pp. 27-28.

92. Loeb's remark appears in the *Commercial Appeal*, 28 March 1968, p. 1. The council's adoption of the union recognition policy is mentioned by Pat Watters and J. Edwin Stanfield, *In Memphis: One Year Later* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1969), p. 11.

93. The description of the demonstration on March 28 is drawn principally from the author's observations.

94. Frank, p. 27, said that police officers, "at points as hysterical as those who rioted, had beaten looters, demonstrators, and innocent bystanders with equal energy." Although overdrawn, his observation is in the main correct. There were incidents in which children were sprayed with Mace and others in which persons were beaten beyond the point that they could resist arrest.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

96. See Pat Watters, "Beale Street and Points North: Memphis is Also America," *The Nation*, 22 April 1968, p. 530; Lewis, p. 383; *New York Times*, 30 March 1968, p. 32; and Wofford, p. 210.

97. *Press-Scimitar*, 29 March 1968, pp. 6, 15.

98. *Commercial Appeal*, 29 March 196[illegible] 1.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

100. See *Press-Scimitar*, 1 April 1968, p. 6, and 4 April 1968, p. 8.
101. *Commercial Appeal*, 2 April 1968, p. 6.
102. *Ibid.*; *Commercial Appeal*, 31 March 1968, p. 8.
103. See Thomas Offenburger to SCLC staff, 1 April 1968, Box 122, File 10, King Center archives. Written on behalf of the SCLC's executive committee, Offenburger's memorandum said in part: "We are going to Washington as planned . . . Our action in Memphis will be a prelude to Washington, and should not detract from the Poor People's Campaign. Memphis is a smaller version of what we're going to Washington for."
104. King's address is quoted in Frank, pp. 52-53.
105. Statistics about the rioting after King's death are taken from Willard A. Heaps, *Riots, U.S.A., 1765-1970*, Rev. Ed. (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), pp. 167-168. On casualties in Memphis, see Bailey, p. 110, *Commercial Appeal*, 7 April 1968, p. 8.
106. Memorandum of Understanding Between the City of Memphis and Local 1733 of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, 16 April 1968. Author's files.
107. The *Commercial Appeal* posted a reward of $25,000, which was matched by another $25,000 from the Scripps-Howard chain that operated both papers. The Memphis city council offered a $50,000 reward.
108. *Press-Scimitar*, 16 April 1968, p. 6.

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